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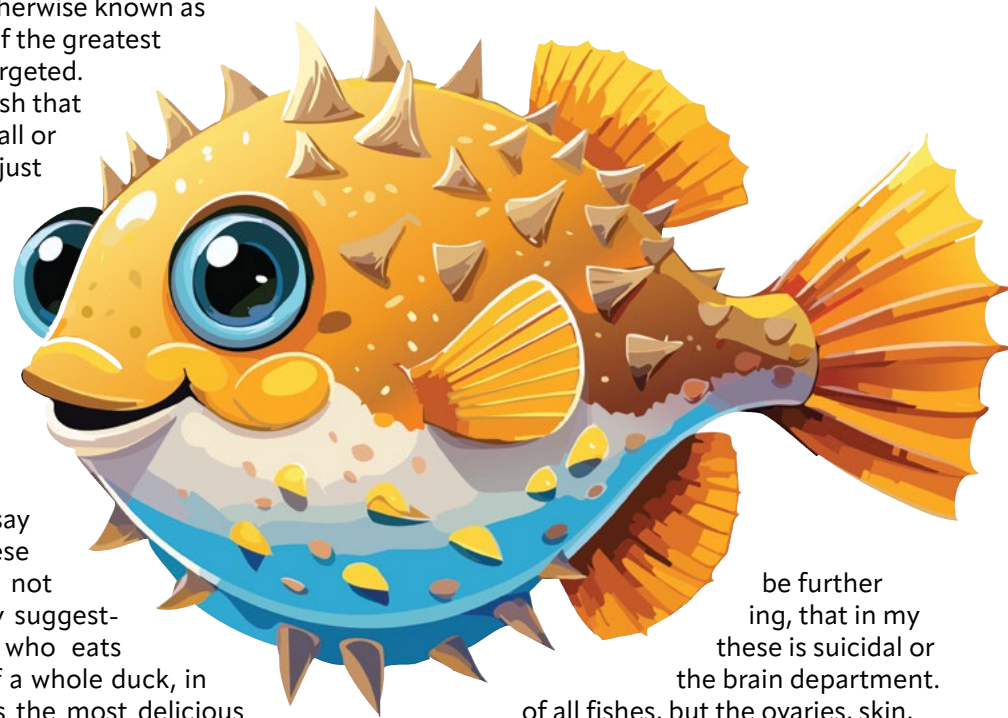
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THE MUCH MALIGNED BLOWFISH

The incredible Blowfish, otherwise known as the Fugu, is certainly one of the greatest gamefish that you never targeted. Where else can you get a fish that can also be used as volleyball or to plug holes in your boat (just stick one in the hole and frighten it)?

In some specialty restaurants in Japan (and a few other places worldwide where people of questionable intelligence gather) the Fugu is considered a delicacy. Do not send me nasty emails and say that I am calling the Japanese stupid, clearly that could not be furthering, that in my these is suicidal or the brain department. I am only suggesting humble opinion, anyone who eats quite a few feathers shy of a whole duck, in Some say that the Fugu is the most delicious muscles and liver contain a deadly poison for of all fishes, but the ovaries, skin, which there is no known antidote. Apparently a dose of this poison adequate to kill an adult can fit on the head of a pin, so never say that I told you to eat anything connected with one of these fish. Personally, I will pass on trying this delicacy because I do not trust either my ability or certainly not anyone else's ability to completely remove every trace of these parts from the fish. Not that much could really be left to eat anyway.



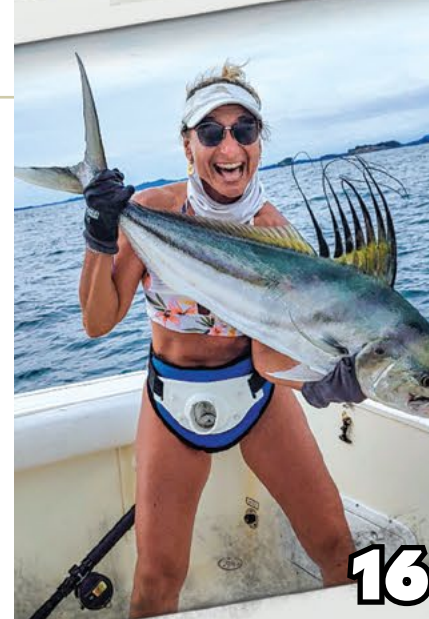
Besides being a fierce fighter, the blowfish is also quite famous for its musical talents. Darius Rucker, of recent country music fame, and several blowfish had a very successful band named Hootie and the Blowfish that played mostly from 1986 to 2008. Around that time, Rucker dumped the poor hapless fish to pursue his solo career. I speculate that perhaps he thought that the fish had begun to smell bad.

The much-maligned Blowfish even has a minor league baseball team named after it that is based in Lexington County SC. I am happy to report that the Blowfish had an excellent year in 2024. I really have to commend everyone involved in naming this team for their obvious sense of humor.

I would like to challenge area fishing tournaments to consider establishment of an event to honor this great fighting fish, or at the very least, add a blowfish category to their existing events. It would definitely be catch and release (who wants to keep a fish who has toxins in it that are 1250 times more lethal than cyanide) and calipers would have to be added as a measuring device. Prior to measuring, anglers would be directed to frighten the little puffer, insuring that they can measure maximum diameter. Appropriate prizes could be selected including possibly blow up dolls, hot air balloon rides, beanbag chairs and several others best left to the imagination.

If you are near Tarpon Springs, stop by Belle Harbour Marina at 307 Anclote Road and come see me. We offer the best dry storage prices around and we are always ready to swap some thrilling blowfish yarns. We also have great rental boats that will get you out there where the blowfish roam, check us out. Our web site is www.belleharbourmarina.com and the phone number is 727-943-8489.

Merle & Flip



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ON THE COVER: Captain Sergio Atanes with a gorgeous Springtime Snook caught on a recent trip in beautiful Chassahowitzka Florida. Read more about his adventure by flipping to page 30 of this issue!

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MARCHING INTO FISHING SEASON

by Captain George Hastick

March is a spectacular fishing month. Everything is coming to life. Not only can you still catch winter fish like large sheepshead, but the flats and docks will be holding plenty of Snook, Seatrout & Redfish, along with some Spanish Mackerel showing up.

One of the great things about this month is the ability to sight cast fish in the shallows of Tampa's flats, due to the clear water we typically have this time of year. There is nothing more exciting than seeing a large Redfish or Snook in shallow water and making the perfect cast while watching the fish turn to intercept your bait or lure. Then at the last second you see the rush of water and the explosive strike, where the water erupts, and the line comes tight. Then the sound of the drag screaming and your adrenaline is flowing in excitement, but is too much line going out! Your excitement turns into concern, and you must get that big fish's head turned before it makes it to the mangroves or dock. Now the heart is pumping, so you lightly palm the spool to put just enough pressure to turn the fish but not break the line! This might happen a few times depending on the size of the fish. After a few close calls, you have the fish, and your hands are

shaking with excitement because it is your new personal best fish! This is the rush from fishing that keeps us coming back.

March is one of those months that will give you many sight fishing opportunities so take advantage of this. This is also a great month to catch an inshore slam of Snook, Trout and Redfish. Which is what many Tampa Bay tournaments are. If you are looking to pull off an inshore slam there are a few things that can help you have an advantage. One of which is to plan your day around the tides of the day you are able to fish.

Of the three, Redfish are more willing to eat during the slack or slow moving water times. Of course, all fish bite better when you have water movement. Snook and Seatrout can literally shut off during slack tide so you must plan your day accordingly. So, if we have a high tide at noon, I will plan on catching my trout on the start of the incoming at the drop off of a grass flat where the fish are waiting for the water to come up.

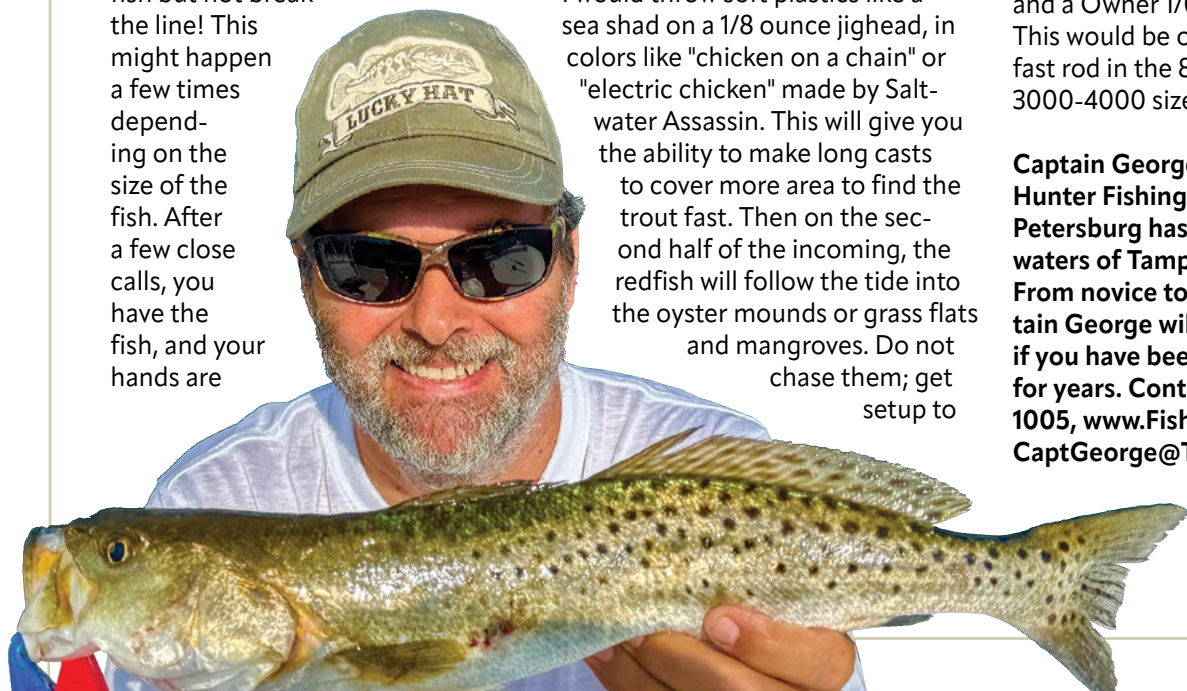
I would throw soft plastics like a sea shad on a 1/8 ounce jighead, in colors like "chicken on a chain" or "electric chicken" made by Salt-water Assassin. This will give you the ability to make long casts to cover more area to find the trout fast. Then on the second half of the incoming, the redfish will follow the tide into the oyster mounds or grass flats and mangroves. Do not chase them; get setup to



where you can cast to these areas. The sea shad in chicken on a chain or live white bait or chunk bait is what I would use for them. Now you can use the outgoing tide to concentrate on catching the Snook to complete the slam. Look for funnel areas like mangrove points, cuts in the mangroves, smaller bridges or anywhere baitfish will be moved by the outgoing current. This will stack the Snook up at what I call feeding stations or danger zones. Live baits like Scaled Sardines, Pinfish or Finger Mullet are hard to beat.

Adjust your line and leader to where you are fishing but typically on the flats & docks, I run 10 to 15# Fins Windtamer with 4 to 5 feet of 20 to 30# Seaguar fluorocarbon leader and a Owner 1/0-2/0 circle hook. This would be on a 7'6" medium fast rod in the 8 to 17# range with a 3000-4000 sized reel. ☑

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



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MARCH ON THE WATER A Timeless Gulf Coast Tradition

by Captain Justin Searcy

There's something special about March in Florida—a time when the water begins to warm, the days grow longer, and the Gulf comes alive with some of the best seafood of the season. Among the state's many coastal treasures, few are as prized (or as delicious) as the Florida stone crab. These clawed delicacies are a true Gulf Coast tradition, and if you've never had the pleasure of catching (or cracking) them yourself, now is the perfect time to change that.

Hunting for Florida's Sweetest Catch

Stone crabs are a remarkable part of Florida's coastal ecosystem, thriving among rocky ledges, reefs, and oyster beds, as well as around docks and jetties. With their powerful claws, they skillfully forage along the seafloor, playing an essential role in maintain-

ing balance beneath the water's surface. What sets them apart is their ability to regenerate—only the claws are harvested, allowing these resilient creatures to continue flourishing. It's a testament to the sustainability of this fishery, and a tradition that, when done responsibly, ensures future generations can enjoy both the experience and the reward.

For those who enjoy the thrill of the chase, setting your own traps can be incredibly rewarding. With the right bait, placement, and patience, you can pull up a bounty of fresh claws—ready to be cracked, dipped, and savored. But before you set out, make sure you understand the rules and regulations that protect this fishery. Visit myfwc.com for the latest rules and regulations on trap requirements, size limits, and harvesting best practices.



True Florida Culinary Experience

Freshly caught stone crab claws are best enjoyed as nature intended—simple, chilled, and unadorned. Unlike most seafood, they are traditionally served cold after being boiled and immediately chilled, preserving their sweet, succulent flavor. Whether paired with freshly drawn butter or enjoyed plain with a spritz of lemon, their natural richness speaks for itself, making every bite a true Gulf Coast indulgence.

Classic Way to Enjoy Them at Home

- 1) Boil a large pot of salted water.
- 2) Drop the claws in for 7-8 minutes, adjusting for size.
- 3) Transfer immediately to an ice bath to stop cooking and preserve texture.
- 4) Serve cracked, with drawn butter, mustard sauce or a touch of citrus (a local favorite is BayshoreBees Honey Mustard).



If you'd rather let the pros do the work, Rusty Bellies in Tarpon Springs is the place to go for some of the freshest stone crab claws around. From boat to table served just the way you like them, with a cold drink and a waterfront view, you can watch the days fresh catch come in. It's a local favorite that truly captures the heart of our coastal lifestyle, and whether it's stone crab season or not, you'll find me pulling up to the dock year-round, enjoying good food, good company, and the simple joys of being on the water.

A Tradition Worth Protecting

Stone crabbing isn't just about the catch—it's about respect for the resource. This is one of Florida's most sustainable fisheries, but like all great things, it requires careful management and responsible harvesting.

I support and appreciate efforts like those led by Captains for Clean Water, who are committed to protecting Florida's waterways and advocating for the conservation of our fisheries. Their work helps ensure that future generations can continue to enjoy not just the tradition of stone crabbing, but the health of the waters that make it all possible.



So whether you're pulling traps inshore or cracking claws at your favorite seafood spot, take a moment to appreciate this seasonal delicacy and the waters that make it possible. March is one of the last great months to indulge before the season closes in May—don't miss the chance to enjoy one of Florida's most iconic seafood experiences.

For more fishing insights, seafood traditions, and Gulf Coast adventures, follow me on *Instagram* @ [capt_justin_searcy](https://www.instagram.com/capt_justin_searcy). See you on the water! 🍷

- Captain Justin Searcy

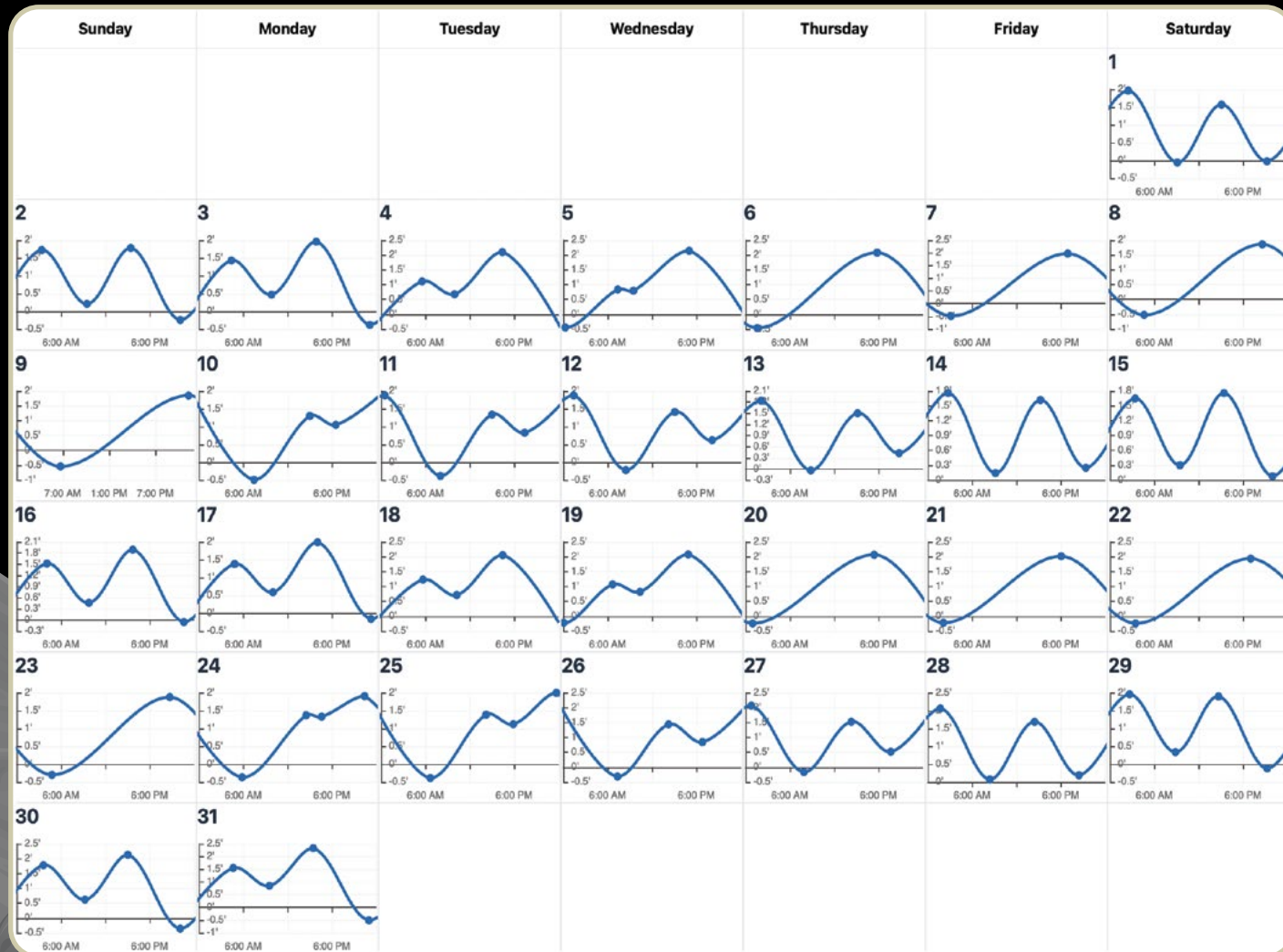


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Conversions for Clearwater Beach Area

High	Low	Location
-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	Location
+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	Location
+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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HOST: Capt. Sergio Atanes • CO-HOST: Capt. George Hastick



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REAL FLORIDA LIVING STILL EXISTS

by Misty Wells

Some folks say "real Florida" living doesn't exist anymore but I am here to tell you they are wrong and they probably have never been to West Volusia County. I took my first trip there in May of 2024 when they reached out to me about coming to film an episode for my show "Let's Take it Outside". I am Florida born and raised but there are still so many places in Florida I have not been, so needless to say, I was excited to explore West Volusia.

They set me and the crew up to stay at Highland Park Fish Camp for a real "old Florida" fish camp stay. Highland Park Fish Camp seems like it is frozen in time; I wish I could have stayed longer. Long before there were theme parks, cruise ports and huge developments in Florida they opened their doors over 63 years ago. They are a family-owned fish camp on 30 acres located on the Norris Dead River, a portion of the St. Johns River. Highland Park Fish Camp has great cabins that can accommodate your whole crew from just a couple to an entire family reunion. They have the coolest Tackle Shop, boat rentals and some of the best fishing guides in the state of Florida. Highland Park has partnered with some of Florida's best fish and I was excited to go fishing and filming with Captain David as I heard he was among the best.

We met early in the morning well before the sun came up and headed out to the secret spot to go catch some Bass.

The reason it is secret is because I honestly have no idea where we were and where we launched the boat.

As the sun came up, the day of fishing started out great and the bite was pretty hot right from the start. We were catching some good size Bass ranging from 3 to 5 lbs., so I was really happy cause that makes for a good fishing show when you actually catch fish. As the morning went on the bite was pretty steady but as the day turned to afternoon, the bite did start to slow down a bit. Captain David announced we were going to move to another side of the lake and go trolling! I am not going to lie; I thought he was pulling my leg because he knew that I don't Bass fish that much. Captain David pulled up the Power Pole and took off across towards the other side, as I

hung on and I wondered if he was a bit crazy. We got to the perfect spot, he handed me a rod, put on a live bait and said hold your rod off the side of the boat. He said "I will have the trolling motor on slow and we will



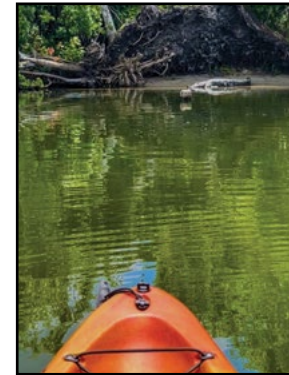
see what happens". Bam! Right off the bat, I caught a nice Bass and I was starting to think he might not be crazy after all. My first catch was a nice 6 lb. Bass, the biggest of the day so far. So, at this point, I am happy and we caught it all on camera.

We only had about 10 minutes left before the charter was over and all of the sudden my rod went down. This next fish was huge! We were fishing light tackle, so I had to really keep calm and not rush this fish like I wanted to. I was so scared I would lose this Bass cause I knew it was going to be my biggest ever if I landed it. I gasped for breath when I saw how big this fish was and was praying that Captain David was able to get him in the net the first time. I could not believe it; this Bass was for sure my personal best that I had ever caught and Jose got it all on camera. I could not wait to weigh this fish, as I was sure it was close to 10 lbs., if not more. It ended up weighing 8.4 lbs. and I was thrilled. A huge shout



out to Highland Park Fish Camp and Captain David for giving me one of my best days on the water and putting me on my "PBB"; personal best Bass.

After all that excitement it was time to see what else West Volusia County had to offer, so we headed over to De Leon Springs State Park to take a dip and do a little kayaking. The State Park there is very unique, and they have a lot of Florida history.



First, we headed to the kayak rentals so I could get out on the water and check out the local wildlife, and by wildlife, I mean the local gators. There were a lot of native birds spending time on the shorelines looking for small fish and a few fairly big gators getting a tan, as well. It is a great place to kayak, but if that is not your style, they also have a great sightsee-

ing tour boat. Look, by this time, I was hungry and they have a very special place to dine in the park called "Old Sugar Mill Pancake House." Back in the 1830s this was the sight of an original sugar mill and now you can step back-in-time and learn the art of the perfect pancake. They have griddle top tables where you can make your own pancakes and eat as much as your heart desires. Now if pancakes are not your thing, no worries because



you don't have to fly to New York or Chicago for a 5-star dinner, just make a reservation at Cress. Cress is truly one of the best restaurants I have ever eaten at and I travel a lot. It is worth the trip to just to go and dine there; to be honest. For dessert we headed right around the corner to "Pat and Toni's Sweet Things", the #1 candy story in Florida by my standards.

Next up on the list was working off some of those pancakes and our 5-star dinner at Cress by hitting the trail; the horse trail that is. We headed over to Deep Creek Stables for a really nice trail ride on their beautiful property. I have not ridden in a while so I did need a little bit of refresher; I love that they start you in the round-pen so you can get warmed up. We went on a great ride and

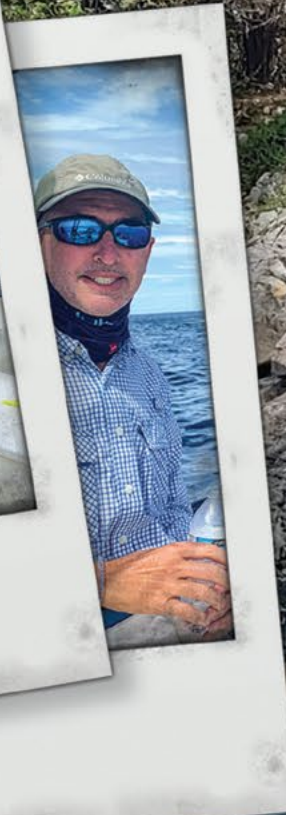
their horses are fun to ride; the horses have spunk, but not too much and you can tell the horses love their job. I highly recommend looking them up when you visit West Volusia as it really takes you back in time when the "Florida Crackers" used to heard cattle back in the day.

Every Floridian knows that no trip in Florida is complete unless you go on an airboat ride and search for that "honey" gator hole. I hooked up with Airboat & Gator Charters and their slogan is "the swamp is our playground" and they mean it. I have to honest I lost count of how many alligators we saw; there were just so many and our captain knew a lot of them by name.

I wish we could have stayed longer because we were just getting started, but only so much content can fit into an episode. Before we left, we did take a great bike ride with some new friends on one of their bike trails and went on a hike in a local park. I am excited to head back to West Volusia this summer and re-visit some of my past experiences and find some new ones, as well. I want to invite you to watch the full episode of "Let's Take it Outside" we filmed in West Volusia. It is available 24/7 on demand on Waypoint TV, Carbon TV, Discovery GO & Discovery Plus and of course right on my YouTube channel. I know once you see how big the Bass are and how wonderful the area and it's locals are, you will be planning your trip this year, as well. West Volusia is proof that "real Florida" does still exist, and they are ready for you to come visit them. 📌



Misty Wells is producer & Host of "Let's Take It Outside" TV show airing to over 320 million on Discovery Channel, Waypoint TV, Bally Sun Sports, H2O, Pursuit Up, Hunt Channel, MOTV, TCT, Discover Florida Network & Carbon TV. Bass Pro-Outdoor Pro & Outdoor & Travel Writer. Founder of "A Reel Future" non-profit devoted to teaching the passion of fishing & conservation to foster children, over 3,800 children & counting. www.mistywells.com



FISHING IN PANAMA

By Joel Dubey

Like a lot of avid fisherman, I've have lots of "bucket list" fish I've wanted to catch over the years. I've checked off many of the fish on my bucket list, but a few stubborn species have eluded me. I'm always on the lookout for fishing opportunities when I travel and every once in a while I run across an amazing fishery.

Most recently my Wife and I were in Panama sailing the San Blas islands (basically the Bahamas of Panama). We had a few extra days after the sailing trip to explore Panama, so I Googled "fishing in Panama" to see if there was anything interesting there. I was shocked. I know the advertisements only show the biggest fish caught, but the reviews I was reading about people's fishing trips were hard to believe. Most notably the fish on the top of my fishing bucket list (the Roosterfish) seemed to be caught in abundance. I spent 2 days Roosterfishing in Costa Rica several years ago and never saw one. I thought I would never get another chance. With a little more research, I found that two other fish on my bucket list were also caught in abundance in Panama; the Cubera Snapper and the Black Marlin. In all my years in Florida, I don't think I have ever seen more than a half dozen Cubera, and never anything in the sizes they see in Panama. I have caught all the billfish species in the Atlantic (Blue Marlin, White Marlin, Sailfish and Swordfish) and even caught Pacific Sailfish in Costa Rica, but I never came close to catching a Black Marlin. Would it be possible to check all three of these off my bucket list?



We decided to take a trip to David, Panama (*pronounced Da-veed*). It's remote, not overfished and all the fishing reviews from there were great. January is a busy time for fishing in David, but we were able to pick up a booking that was recently cancelled. We spoke with Kerry Leggett at Come Fish Panama and I asked him how the Roosterfishing was. He said "Great. We catch them every day". That's all I needed to hear. We booked him for 2 days aboard a 29-foot twin engine Pursuit open fisherman. Here's how it went.

DAY 1: I made it very clear to our crew (captain and mate) that the mission was to catch a Roosterfish. Their English was very spotty, but they understood. We went out and caught a live-well full of Blue Runners on sabiki rigs in about 50 feet of water. The captain was able to read the vast school of Blue Runners on the fish finder. From there it was time to fish. The problem with Roosterfish and Cubera Snapper is that they are inshore species and feed with the tide. Sometimes you have to wait a while before the bite turns on. No problem here, we slow trolled the Blue Runners for a couple of hours and threw a giant popper lure on a 30 lb. test spinning rod. We had a steady haul of 20+ pound Jack Crevalle, 25+lb Barracudas and other fish. This kept us busy until the Roosterfish turned on. When the tide turned right, the fish started biting. We lost a nice Cubera Snapper after he cut us off on the rocks. We lost another one after he pulled the hooks on the lure.

Finally I hooked up with what I thought was another Jack Crevalle, but he was



fighting much harder and seemed to be headed to the bottom. The Captain said it looked like a Cubera Snapper. This was one tough fish! After a 20 minute or so fight with the rod completely doubled over,

up came a 50+ pound Cubera Snapper. I couldn't believe the size of this fish, and this wasn't even a big one. They catch them over 80 pounds all the time. Ten to twelve big Jack Crevalle and a Cubera Snapper to check off my bucket list. I was happy if that's all we caught, but a few minutes later my rod went off again. The line was flying off the reel. I thought this was going to be a world record Jack Crevalle when this massive Roosterfish leapt 8 feet out of the water. The Captain and Mate (and I) went crazy. The mate yelled "Roosterfish" followed by the Captain yelling "Cock-a-doodle-doo" about a dozen times. I instantly knew this might be my only chance at a Roosterfish.

After about 25 minute of brutal tug-of-war, there he was, 30+ pounds. I finally got my Roosterfish! Cross two amazing fish off the bucket list! They day wasn't done yet however. After catching a couple more Jack Crevalle my Wife said, "The next fish to hit that rod is mine". I said "Okay. That's fine, but if it's a Roosterfish you're going overboard". A couple of minutes later, her rod goes off and wouldn't you know it, she caught a 25 pound roosterfish of her own, and no, I didn't throw her overboard. We caught several more Jack Crevalle and it was time to head home. What a great day. Crystal clear water, never saw another boat the entire day and It's not often you strike two fish off your lifelong bucket list in one day. Come Fish Panama is strictly catch and release so those big guys are back in the water for me to catch another day.

DAY 2: After the first day of fishing the Captain told me that offshore fishing was very good and that they were seeing a ton of Black Marlin. I talked it over with my wife and we decided to go offshore and try our luck on a Marlin. I have

caught Tuna and Dorado many times in Florida and while they are both abundant in Panama we decided to specifically target Marlin. We trolled giant lures and fresh Bonita bellies as well as some slow trolling of live Bonita. The trip offshore takes quite a bit longer so the actual fishing time is shorter, but the sheer number of Marlin in Panama is staggering. After about an hour of trolling the largest lure went down and the line started pouring off the 50 wide Penn International reel. A moment later a 300-pound Black Marlin was dancing across the water. He was leaping several feet out of the water over and over trying to shake the hook.

After about 10 minutes of non-stop running and leaping the line on the spool was getting perilously thin. I looked at the Captain and then down at the reel and we decided to chase the Marlin down before he spooled us. About 30 minutes later I checked off another species from my bucket list. We went on to raise 5 more fish that day. We pulled the hooks on 2 more marlin, but I was more than satisfied. The fishery for billfish in this area is incredible. Listening to the radio every boat was raising fish and landing Sailfish and Marlin (Black and Blue). It was amazing to hear the Captains working together letting each other know where the fish were and what lures were working best.



All-in-all David, Panama was amazing. We saw schools of whales, thousands of dolphin and thousands of birds. Baitfish were plentiful and the sheer number of gamefish

is staggering. This fishery seems untouched and Kerry Leggett from Come Fish Panama told me that this was nothing compared to Tuna fishing in April where Yellowfin Tuna over 100 pounds are practically a guarantee. I plan on going back one day to catch a Yellowfin Tuna on the fly rod!

Of all the places I have fished around the world, David, Panama stands out as one of the most diverse and untapped fisheries I have ever been to.

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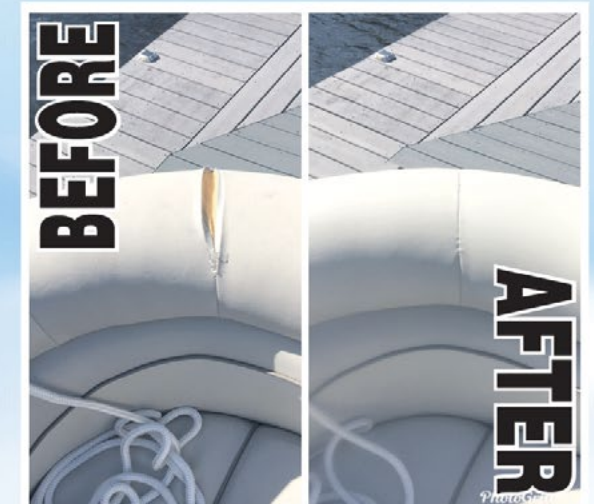
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TALES FROM THE OLD GUY

by David Mallory

This month my "Tales from the Old Guy" will be a bit different. For the past 60 years (720 months!), I have managed to catch at least one fish (hopefully more!) every month. In January 2025 I was hospitalized after becoming ill on a cruise and ended up in a rehab facility to regain my strength. My wife and I had been scheduled to fish with Captain George Hastick on January 30th, but since I was in rehab, we had to cancel. I became so sad and depressed to think that my 60 year old record was about to end. The following is what happened to change my 720 month record to 721 months!

Over the years we have become good friends with Captain George. George called me several times to check in with how I was doing in rehab and to talk over his recent fishing

trips. He knew I was very upset with missing our fishing trip in January.

George searched the area around the rehab facility on Google maps. He saw there was a pond right behind the building where I was located. He arrived on the 30th with a hat, sunglasses, sunscreen, fishing gear and bread balls, shrimp and corn. He parked his vehicle next to the pond and tested the pond by throwing in some bread balls to see where the fish were located. George then came in, registered and took me out in my wheelchair through the parking lot to the pond. When we got outside, George wheeled me over near his truck, pulled out a fishing pole and corn, which he said he had fished with successfully as a kid.

George threw in a few pieces of corn to chum, watched them disappear and we were in business. He rigged up a pole for me with corn pieces, threw my line in the pond and handed the pole to me. A few seconds went by and I got a bite! I hooked a fish which fell off on the way in. Not to be daunted, we tried again and I caught a bluegill! Mission accomplished. I had a fish for January and my record was intact! I continued



fishing since we were all set up anyway and having fun. The next fish was a variation of the bluegill, a red eared bluegill.

After a while I caught six fish, but a nurse came by and said we couldn't fish there. We had caught six fish, so we didn't argue even though there were no signs that said no fishing.

While we were fishing, George called my wife (who knew nothing about this adventure) to tell her that we were fishing. She just couldn't imagine what was happening and started crying at the sight of me fishing. She was so touched by George's generosity and willingness to go the extra mile for me. He and his wife went out of their way to make this "Old Guy" happy. There is no way George could have made me happier that day. He is such a good person, good friend and great fishing captain – on land and water!

Note from Pauline – this act of kindness turned Dave's rehabilitation around by 180 degrees. He is doing so much better and has the incentive to improve and work hard to get better to continue catching fish each month. 🍷

- David Mallory





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SAVE THE DATE: THE 33RD ANNUAL NEWS CHANNEL 8 OUTDOORS EXPO & BOAT SHOW

Calling all outdoor enthusiasts and water & nature lovers! The 33rd Annual News Channel 8 Outdoors Expo and Boat Show is back; it's free and it's a great family and dog friendly event at Armature Works along the Hillsborough River.



Who says the best things in life aren't free? Well, they were wrong because this amazing outdoors show is free and tons of fun for the whole family. News Channel 8 is teaming up with the beautiful waterfront view of Armature Works in historic downtown Tampa to bring the 33rd Annual News

Channel 8 Outdoors Expo and Boat Show.

This annual outdoor show will span over three days with admission free to all. There will be raffle giveaways, tons of activities and local vendors all weekend! The Outdoors Expo and Boat Show begins Friday, March 28th through Sunday, March 30th. The family friendly event will feature the beautiful downtown Tampa skyline, ability to tour boats in the water, the Armature Works food hall, a dog friendly outdoor space, seminars and activities throughout the whole weekend.

There will also be meet and greet opportunities with the News Channel 8 anchors and Misty Wells of Discovery Channels "Let's Take it Outside" TV Show. Misty will also be the Emcee of



the 2nd Annual "Mullet Toss" competition as a fundraiser for her non-profit, "A Reel Future". Every Mullet Toss competitor (over 21) will win "Free Beer" and be in the drawing for a Free Off-shore Charter with "Un-Reel Fishing Outfitters" in Clearwater, Florida.

With nearly 400,000 square feet of exhibit and activity space, this Expo is the perfect place to explore boats of all shapes and sizes, boating accessories, fishing gear, apparel, outdoor sup-



plies, 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 34th Annual News Channel 8 Outdoors Expo and Boat Show takes place on Friday, March 28th, from 12 p.m. to 6 p.m., Saturday, March 29th from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Sunday, March 30th from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Armature Works located at 1910 North Ola Avenue in Tampa, Florida.

Parking at Armature works will be event pricing in the lots, street and parking garage. You could also use the Riverwalk or The Pirate Taxi! Admission to the event is FREE, we will see you and your crew there!



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Captain Sergio Atanes

March means everything starts to fall into place. Snook will slowly work their way out from the creeks and Redfish schools start to roam the flats looking for food. Whitebait should start moving into the flats to bring in some early

Cobia action and depending on water temperatures, Spanish Mackerel should start to show up along the edges of drop-offs and spoil islands mid to late March.

Black Drum start their migration into Tampa Bay action and should also be hot and heavy depending on the water temperatures.



Captain George Hastick

March should really kick off a good variety of fishing opportunities with the warming trend we are seeing. There will still be some Sheepshead around with a decent Trout bite also, but the Snook and larger Redfish should come alive

at this time. They will still be around the docks but will also be on the flats and under the mangroves. Scaled Sardines should start to show up on various flats along with channel markers and the bridges up inside Tampa Bay. You should also see an uptick with the Mangrove Snapper around docks, rock jetties, rock piles and the reefs. During this time, it is good to have a variety of bait ready for whatever fish you may encounter.

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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CHASSAHOWITZKA: COLD WEATHER, HOT BITE

by Captain Sergio Atanes

A fishing trip can be a memorable experience for both young and old. During the shooting of our new TV show we traveled to Chassahowitzka, a small community just a 1-hour drive north of Tampa. As we entered the quite little town, I had memories of yesteryear as a young boy living in Ybor City. We all felt like we had traveled back in time at least fifty years. The locals are great still with plenty of old homes and some bed and breakfast places just before you get to the campground. Things are changing but at a much slower pace, so I suggest you give it a try and enjoy what Florida used to be like before its gone forever.



Kurt Frahn was our host at a place called the Chassahowitzka Outfitters; a beautiful fish camp located right on the river.



It is quiet and peaceful, the camp is tastefully decorated to accommodate the angling crowd; a place to relax, enjoy wildlife and some terrific fishing. Our chef, Mark, the owners brother spent many years overseas fine tuning his cooking skills until settling down at Chassahowitzka Outfitters.

The Chassahowitzka River is a spring-fed river located in Citrus County, Florida. The river runs a good 5-miles, being a natural heaven for hundreds of species of birds and even bald eagles. It's fed by a magnitude of springs keeping the waters clear and abundant with fish. Downstream the mixer of fresh and saltwater of the gulf turns into a fisherman paradise catching anything from Spotted Seatrout, Redfish, Snook and Mullet just to name a few.

Now let's talk fishing with names like Eagle Beak, the most knowledgeable guide on the river along with our other guides, Captain Al and Captain Randy. We had the cream of the crop taking us out for 2 days of fishing.

Problem number one, extreme cold weather. Second, very negative tides to contend with but both were overcome and plenty of fish were boated. Everyone limited out on trout with a few trophies and the captain helped me boat one of the biggest snook caught in the area in awhile; a



beautiful female which I quickly released. What made it even better was it was caught on my favorite artificial bait, the Saltwater Assassin in "chicken on a string" color.



Tip to fish the river is never let your bait sink to the bottom or it becomes catfish time. Rather work your artificial baits slowly with an upward motion to keep it just off the bottom. It takes some time to get the hang of it, but once you do, its game on! As a suggestion, try using a 1/8 jighead and you don't need a leader. Remember you are going to lose some tackle no matter what and my experience the fish don't seem to care. The river channel itself changes as the deepest water is not necessary in the center of the river but moves in and out from the shoreline. This



is where an experienced guide can well be worth his price; let him teach you the best areas and where to stay away from or you can always buy a new lower unit unless you are a kayaker.

Tides play an important part in fishing the creeks and small bays. It's best to work your way into the creeks with an incoming tide and plan to exit about an hour into the outgoing tide. The creeks

can produce nice Redfish, Black Drum, Seatrout and some Flounder. When fishing the creeks you can use fresh dead shrimp on a 2/0 circle hook with a light weight. My goto is a #4 split shot just above the hook. The secret is not to drag the bottom but lift the tip of the rod quickly and retrieve at a steady pace or you'll get stuck on the bottom.

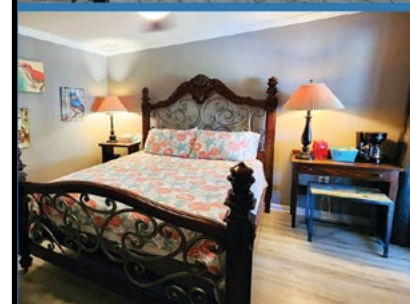
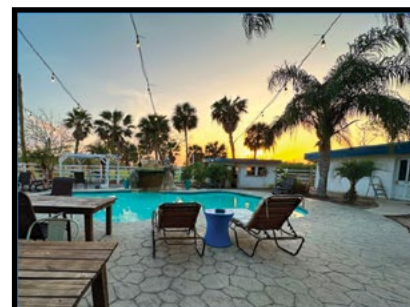
A chart of the area is an important "must have" and I do recommend a GPS to find your way back. It could be stressful when it's time to head home and you are in some creek and have no idea on how to get out.

RECAP ON FISHING THE RIVER

- Watch the tides.
- Use current chart.
- Use your GPS.
- Light tackle 10-pound test braided line.
- 2/0 circle hook for bait fishing.
- 1/8 oz jigheads for artificial baits.
- No leader saves time and money.
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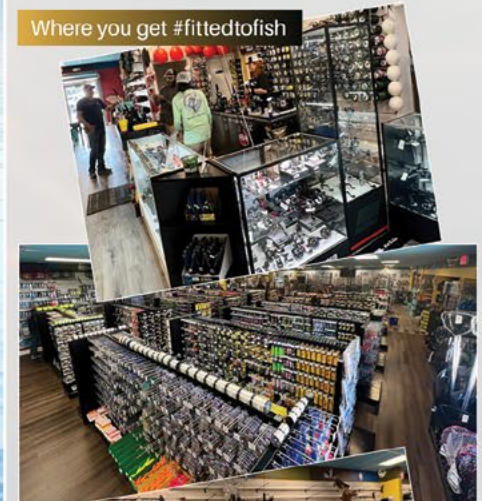
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