

Bonefish 1, 2, 3 . . .
By: Captain Ted Wilson
09/27/2006

Welcome to “la-la” land. Early Fall is one of the best times of year to fish the flats and backcountry of the Florida Keys. Not necessarily because there are more fish out there than any other time of year, but because there are so few fishermen. I’m pretty sure tumbleweeds outnumber the fishermen in Florida Bay right now and **I LOVE IT**. Can I say it any louder.

Bonefishing has been spectacular. Big fish have been a little hard to come by, but “zipper” fish in the two to six pound range have been off the charts. Tales of 5 to 10 fish days (frequently on fly) are becoming, dare I say, common. Considering how difficult bonefish have become to find in the spring over the last few years, this is refreshing to say the least.

As long as we’re on the subject of bonefish reliability, it’s time for a shameless plug in the name of conservation for one of our favorite fish. University of Miami’s Rosenstiel School and the non-profit conservation organization, Bonefish & Tarpon Unlimited (BTU), will embark on a bonefish census to be held from Biscayne Bay to Key West on **Thursday, October 19**. This census aims to determine population trends and most importantly establish a baseline population count for one of the area’s most valuable game fish.

Last year, over 60 teams spread out across 19 zones from Key Biscayne to the Marquesas accumulating bonefish sightings during the one-day survey. Census results were then reported to the Rosenstiel School team, headed by marine biology and fisheries professor Dr. Jerry Ault,. Statistical analyses indicated a population of just over 310,000 bonefish in the Florida Keys fishery.

Bonefish sport fishing contributes approximately \$1.5 billion annually to the Florida economy. Considering that bonefish only inhabit Biscayne Bay and our beloved Florida Keys, that kind of narrows it down to where the \$1.5 bill is actually going. Think about it folks. Hotels, restaurants, marinas, convenience stores, etc. all benefit either directly or indirectly from the ghost of the flats. This tally of the tails is in all of our best interests.

The Florida Keys Fishing Guides Association, the Lower Keys Fishing Guides Association and the Key Largo Fishing Guides Association are offering valuable assistance with boats and people power to ensure coverage of the areas. Professional guides and experienced bonefish anglers are needed to participate. It is also a great time for an angler to book a guide and fish for science or spend time with a friend counting bones for science.

For additional information or to join the census count effort, contact Jim Trice (trice_j@bellsouth.net) at 305.664.3864 or Dr. Jerry Ault (jault@rsmas.miami.edu) at 305.421.4884. Dr. Jerry can be a little hard to get a hold of, so try Jim first.

Census packages can be obtained at the following locations: Don’s Bait and Tackle in Homestead, the Yellow Bait House in Key Largo, Sandy Moret’s Florida Keys Outfitters in Islamorada, the World Class Angler in Marathon, the Saltwater Angler in Key West, by emailing Jim Trice at trice_j@bellsouth.net or by going to www.tarbone.org.

Organizers are urging as many anglers and guides as possible to participate and especially need more help counting in the Middle Keys’ zones.
