

## **Bonefishing one, two, three . . .**

**By: Captain Ted Wilson**

Finally it's starting to feel like autumn. Football season is pounding away and air temperatures are starting to feel down right civil. Seeing how the football teams in south Florida aren't giving us much to cheer about, at least the fishing will put a smile on your face.

If it's a fight your looking for, go no further than your nearest large channel. The fall run of mullet is in full swing and the predators are right on their heels. As schools of mullet get flushed back and forth through the major inlets, big jack crevalle, sharks and tarpon have been terrorizing them with reckless abandon. Mornings are the best to time to witness the frenzy. Just keep your eyes open for fish busting through schools of mullet like there's no tomorrow and run over to the fray. Any offering will do when the fish are in a frenzy, but it never hurts to throw the real thing. If you can catch some of the mullet they are eating use those. Large plugs will work well if live bait isn't an option.

Backcountry fishing has been very good. Falling average temperatures have made spending a full day out back much more enjoyable than in months past. Snook, redfish, tarpon, trout even tripletail have all been good options.

Tarpon are everywhere but look in the mouths of the major runoffs for rolling fish. Jigs with or without a shrimp, pilchards and even pinfish have been working. Be patient with these fish. Sometimes you can throw 50 times with nothing to show for it, then bang.

Days of 10 to 20 snook are happening with some regularity. While this may sound great I have to temper this claim by saying that many of the fish are juveniles. There are a few decent fish out there, but most of the fish are more like "sneaks" instead of snook. They'll get bigger folks, just remember to handle them gently when you release these immature fish. There are sharks everywhere out back right now just waiting for a tired, gimpy fish to make their life a little easier. Try pilchards or shrimp on a jighead bounced near the bottom and you'll get results. The Berkley "gulp" baits have been working as well. Those things catch just about everything. They stink, they're fragile and kind of expensive but they work, even snapper eat them like they're the real thing. There are also some very nice reds by Keys standards cruising the same areas as the snook. Fish in the 30-inch range have been popping up with enough frequency to dismiss it as a fluke.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Bonefish Population Census of the Florida Keys has been scheduled for Saturday, October 27<sup>th</sup>. The bonefish census, coordinated by Bonefish & Tarpon Unlimited and the University of Miami RSMAS is conducted to determine population trends of one of the Keys most important sport fish.

Last year over 60 teams spread out from Biscayne Bay to the Marquesas to accumulate bonefish sightings in the one-day survey. Census results indicated a population of just over 300,000 bonefish (over 14 inches) in the Florida Keys fishery.

The Florida Keys, Lower Keys and the Key Largo Fishing Guides Associations are offering tremendous assistance with boats and manpower to ensure coverage of the areas. However, greater coverage and participation is still required and help would be greatly appreciated. Professional guides and knowledgeable flats anglers are all welcome to participate. **All information collected during the census will remain confidential and will only be used for scientific research purposes.**

For additional information or to join the census count effort contact:

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