

Explosive!

Fourth of July came and went with a bang. Falling midweek seemed to spread the masses over a larger number of days which made for a more enjoyable holiday for all involved. The fireworks awed the crowds by both land and by sea. Whether you were out to catch the pyrotechnics or some fish, both were met by explosions of all shapes and sizes.

Offshore fishing has been spectacular with dolphin to 45 pounds found lurking under hovering birds and debris. Once you find the fish then pitching ballyhoo, squid, live pilchards or cigar minnows in front of them can usually get them going. Most know to keep a hooked fish in the water to keep the school around the boat after locating some dolphin. Throwing some cut up chunks behind the transom will also keep them feeding until the school is exhausted..



Blackfin tuna won't seem to go away. Monster blackfins are marauding live bait and trolled feathers around "the humps". The Islamorada hump seems to be holding "football" size fish and for the big boys to 25 pounds, "go west, young man," seems to be the best advice. Some argue that freezing blackfin tuna can leave you with a bad taste in your mouth, so consider only keeping enough fish to eat fresh.

Some wahoo have been showing up offshore. Captain Clyde Upchurch on the Fountainhead brought in a nice rack of fish up to 40 pounds. One method to catch wahoo is high-speed trolling a sturdy lure on your way to and from the dolphin grounds. It's sort of a "what could it hurt" way of fishing, but usually about the time you think, "nothing ever hits this stupid thing we've been trolling for hours"--bang!

Backcountry fishing is hotter than. . . well, the Fourth of July. Snook have moved into the deep backcountry, and they're hungry. Offshore convert, Captain Skip Nielsen caught 14 medium to large "linesiders" during an outing including five on fly. Not all that surprising if you know Skippy—if it swims he can catch it. Most anglers armed with bug spray and some live bait targeting snook are coming home happy. Trout are still a mainstay for many anglers, and who can blame them. Fish to five pounds are eating basically anything that moves all day long. Deep channels and murky water found around large schools of mullet have been attracting trout for months. Along with them are usually their buddies the jack, ladyfish and shark.. Just throw jigs or soft plastics in different colors until somebody starts to hit, then everybody switch to that color.

For the flats fisherman things just seem to get better. Bonefish are showing up in good numbers on both the ocean and bayside flats. Shrimp work well, but are small this time of year. If that is the case, just use two. Slide one up through the tail, pull the hook through and slide another one over the hook. It doesn't look at all natural, but it works. A small split-shot can also give you extra weight. Unfortunately, extra weight means extra splash when the bait hits the water and that spooks bonefish. Here lies the rub. Use as little weight or bait as possible to make a fairly long cast. The deeper and chopier the water, typically the more splash you can get away with.

Tarpon numbers are dwindling but are still a huge draw. Fly fisherman can find fish moving north on the ocean over migration routes or deep in the backcountry moving along edges or laid up in the basins. Bait fisherman sticking to the bridges with crabs and pinfish are still having good to great luck catching tarpon early in the morning and late in the evening. Baby tarpon are starting to show up in greater numbers and should continue to do their thing for the next few months.

Don't forget, season is closed for snook. They're fattening themselves up to spawn soon, so play nice. I know everybody likes a good fish photo, just take it easy on them if you can. Try to minimize the photos and try to lift them over the water or not at all if possible. Release them in a condition that they won't be so tired that they swim off and get munched by the ever present lemon shark (or any of his cousins). After all, they're just trying to make more baby snook for us to catch later.