

My How Things Have Changed . . .
By: Captain Ted Wilson

It feels good to get back to the old typewriter. Actually it's a P.C. to be correct. Change takes time. I'm still struggling with the transition from video to DVD and I maintain that musicians produce "albums." My absence is due to the recent arrival of a new little bundle of joy in my family. While I try not to manipulate this column for my personal use, it's tough not to mention something as life changing as the birth of your first child. The weather channel may not have mentioned any hurricanes in the Keys, but one showed up in my living room a few weeks ago. Her name is Ali Beth, and I think she likes to fish.

Mid-August is a glorious time to fish in the Keys. Granted, it is hot, but that's why God made half days. Get out early and come in when things get hot and typically the fishing slows down anyway. Go back out in the evening if you can't get enough. The nice thing about this time of year is you'll pretty much have the place to yourself. The fish have realized the pressure has been lifted and are in good spirits. This time of year fishing, like the weather, gets into rhythm. If something worked for you out on the water one day, it will probably work the next.

Tarpon season is supposed to be over. Fortunately, nobody told the tarpon. The massive push of migratory fish that flood our waters every Spring have indeed moved to wherever it is they go. Only in the absence of these visiting fish can the local fish stretch their fins and take care of some personal business. Kind of like the local people. Many like to label these fish as "babies." True, some of them don't tip the scales very far, but these are some of the most spectacular fish. They eat with reckless abandon, and once hooked will spend most of the time in the air. To classify a tarpon as a "baby" is somewhat speculative. Some say any fish under 50 pounds should qualify. I personally think there's nothing "baby" about a 49-pound tarpon not to mention that the males don't grow as large as the females. I have heard they rarely exceed 45 pounds. Instead of putting a poundage on the cutoff, we should consider their age when classifying their status. Technically, a tarpon does not mature sexually until it is between the age of four and seven years. That's pretty old for a fish considering most fish that live offshore including dolphin and sailfish don't live more than three or four years. Until tarpon reach sexual maturity they will spend their lives in places where they can get plenty of forage and there aren't many predators. Places like Florida Bay. After a few years in "the nursery", the fish that survive to sexual maturity will move on with the next migration the following spring. These fish will take a variety of baits and artificial offerings. Large shrimp (if you can find them) are a great choice to entice a tarpon of any size. Pilchards are a top bait as well. If live bait isn't in the cards, try white bucktails or tarpon flies. Most of the fish can be caught on light spinning rods that you might use for bonefish or redfish. Ten-pound test with a small length of 30-pound monofilament for a leader should be enough.

There are some big tarpon still around. For these leftover fish you can use the same techniques that one might use in the Spring. Elevenish-weight fly rods or 30-pound conventional rigs. Eighty-pound leader should be enough with some live baiters using a 100 most of the time. The fish are actually still around the bridges. The only problem is that now there are thousands of lobster traps sharing the same waters. Drifting is nearly impossible, but anchoring is still an option. If you really want to escape the traps, look deep into the backcountry for gulf tarpon where trapping is not allowed. Live mullet, ladyfish, pinfish even grunts suspended six-feet under a float and some patience is all it takes. Sharks will keep you occupied while waiting for the

silver king, so be sure to bring plenty of bait and hooks.

Now is the time to fish in the Keys. The fish are here and the people are not. It actually feels much nicer on the water than it does on land. Maybe it's the breeze. Maybe it's because a hot day fishing is always better than a hot day mowing the lawn. Take precautions to deal with the heat, but don't let the weather stop you.