

No Need to Argue . . .

By: Captain Ted Wilson

Whenever my anglers ask me when is the best time to fish in the Keys, I usually beat around the bush. I can painstakingly debate the pro's and con's of various months or seasons. From there I can label each time frame with the particular species of fish that present themselves better during each period because of this reason or that reason. In addition, seasonal weather patterns are entered into the equation to further one point or another. After an exhaustive explanation of why each month should be given consideration when deciding the *best* time to fish in the Keys, my final answer usually is . . . May.

The reason May is considered the best month to fish in the Keys is complex. Weather is certainly a factor. It's not too hot, it's not too cold. The rain and lightning storms haven't gotten too cranked up yet, and hurricanes are not even on the radar. My favorite reason is that virtually any fish that graces us with their presence throughout the year are in town right now.

Tarpon fishing is in full swing. Fly fishermen are catching fish from out front to as far back as you want to go. After a mediocre April, tarpon are finally starting to move through their migration routes. This makes fly fishing a little easier. When they move down the contours of the ocean that parallel the Keys, fishermen can plug into the line and intercept them on their age old journey. Even relatively novice fly fishermen have a good chance to get a fly in front of the business end of a tarpon if positioned correctly while the tarpon are on the move. If schools of fish continue to follow the same route as the ones before them, anglers can simply stake off or anchor the boat and cast to fish as the parade goes by. If the fish are scattered, which is usually the case in the backcountry, then anglers will need to pole to intercept passing fish. Backcountry tarpon fly fishing can be a patience game. You may have to pole an entire bank in hopes of one or two shots at tarpon. The good news is that those one or two shots may turn into one or two hookups. Oceanside tarpon fishing is usually a numbers game. While it may be possible to see hundreds of cruising tarpon during an outing, only a small percentage of them are even remotely interested in eating. The interesting thing about fly fishing for tarpon on the ocean side is you never know which one of the many tarpon you encounter will be the one to take. Countless perfect presentations go unnoticed then a not so perfect cast to an unlikely recipient gets chased down and inhaled like the tarpon was waiting for it. When it all comes together and a tarpon engulfs your fly, it is possibly the most exciting thrill ride on earth.

Permit fishing is very good right now. There are two approaches to catching permit on the flats. The first is to go looking for them exclusively. Certain characteristics in a flat have a tendency to draw more permit than others. Deeper water adjacent to crusty flats (good crab habitat, their favorite food) are good places to look for them. Unfortunately, some of the best places to look for permit like this are unlikely to harbor anything but permit. Not a bad thing, it's just putting your eggs all in one basket. Another approach is to go sight fishing for bonefish and keep a rod rigged with a small live crab ready in case you run into a permit. Permit will move right up onto the crown of a flat in search of food just like bonefish. Finding them in bonefish territory is a little more sporadic than along the edge. The good news is when you find them up in the shallows they are usually all business in their quest for crabs. It is then that even an errant cast can get a welcome reception from a hungry permit. They have a way of popping up just about anywhere, but over time you'll learn the flats that seem to hold a few permit in addition to our other favorites.

No matter what your choice is for the best month to fish in the Keys, it's hard to argue with May. All of the most sought after species that we fish for down here are available right now. So quit arguing and go fish.