

Shop Later . . .

By: Captain Ted Wilson

Early to mid-December seems to be a much forgotten time of the year. It is a segment of our calendar nestled between two of the major holidays that can't really stand up on its own. Kind of like the Buick Open or Bayhill in golf. Only the hard core fans take the time to watch the whole tournament. They are actually very competitive and entertaining tournaments. The same can be said for fishing this time of year. Not many people take the time to get on the water with all the goings on of the holidays. However, for the die hards that find a way to get on the water there is some great fishing happening right now.

Snook and red fishing is very good. It has calmed down from the ridiculously good fishing we experienced last month, but it is still solid. Shrimp on a jig head bounced near the bottom of runoffs and deep channels in the backcountry is a time proven way to catch snook of all sizes. Many prefer some type of live fish as bait. Pilchards and pinfish are the two top choices. Pinfish you can buy at any local marina/bait shop but you'll have to catch your own pilchards. Many of the snook and redfish that are biting right now are very small. That's O.K., because it seems like for every two or three of those little guys you catch there's a good one right behind it. Be sure to take good care of these juvenile fish when you catch them. Handle them as little as possible or not at all. A catfish flipper works just as well for snook as it does the lowly cat. That way, you don't rub any of the slime off of the fish or risk dropping it into the bottom of the boat where it bounces around to exhaustion. I always like the guy who tries to help out in those situations by lending the bottom of his shoe and half his weight to "hold the fish still" so somebody can "grab 'em". The procedure is usually accompanied by a juicy spit of tobacco or the flicking of a cigarette butt into the water. Don't do this people. Handle all fish with care, even catfish, and put your butts in the trash back at the dock. Lecture over.

Bonefishing is also a worthy pursuit this time of year. If you're right in the middle of a nasty cold front don't bother, but there's a 50/50 chance the weather will be perfect. On those beautiful stretches of days when the temperature is up and the wind is down be prepared for some of the best bonefishing of the year. Don't be surprised if a permit makes an appearance. You'll know the night before whether or not it's going to be good just by stepping outside. If you don't hear the trees swaying and it's hotter outside than it is inside you're probably in business.

Tarpon of all sizes are meandering through the backcountry. They aren't out there in the huge numbers like we have in the spring but there are some huge fish roaming about. The nice thing about winter-time tarpon is that they generally are hungry. Sounds simple, but keep in mind that spring tarpon have a different agenda. It starts with making baby tarpon and it might or might not involve eating. Fly guys love this time of year when they get to dust off their 12-weights, pack a lunch and head deep into the backcountry in search of the silver king. For most people, a live well full of mullet and some patience fishing in the major channels will do the trick. Big plugs work if you know the fish are there and can get it in front of them.

There's plenty going on right now on the flats and in the backcountry of Florida Bay. If your pinched for time in the hustle and bustle of the holidays you should try to prioritize. If the weather is nice, and it usually is this time of year, head out on the water and avoid the rush. Shop during the cold fronts and remember to never let shopping get in the way of your fishing.

