

Tame is Good

A great mini-season has come to pass. It wasn't great because of the huge numbers of lobsters, actually numbers were down for most. It was great because it seemed to come and go without much fanfare. The roads weren't particularly busy, the restaurants very approachable and the waters were kind of quiet relative to years past.



Regular lobster season gets cranked up now, so get ready to dodge some trap floats. It sure is nice to run around without worrying about where those "balls" are. A necessary evil I guess, just pray no hurricanes move them around like last year. Some lobstermen had thousands of traps displaced during the storms last year. Derelict or "ghost" traps are still someone's property. Harvesting lobster from ghost traps is unlawful. It is understandably tempting when you find a trap that is seemingly ownerless that is chock full of tasty bugs. Don't touch them. The lobsters can come and go as they please, the owner of the trap is trying to find it.

A rule mentioned in this column last week needs some fine tuning. Bridges are only partially off limits to the harvesting of lobster. The rule states that you can't dive or snorkel within 300' of any improved shoreline. So you can't be anywhere near the foot of the bridge or the rocks surrounding the base of the bridge. If a bridge is shorter than 600' you can't possibly be around it and stay outside of 300' of one of the ends. Bridges like Teatable, Whale Harbor, Snake Creek, Tavernier Creek, Bud n Mary's channel and the bridge by Robbie's are all off limits. It is also unlawful to be in the channel. So, if you are not within 300' of the foot of the bridge, and not in the channel, knock yourself out. Long bridges like Indian Key, Long Key, Channel 2 and Channel 5 are possibilities. Bridges are still a great place to get run over, so be careful.

Offshore fishing is still very good. Dolphin are still solid. Offshore convert, Capt GW DePauw on his new boat the "All Lit Up" caught dolphin to 35 pounds trolling skirted ballyhoo around birds and weedlines as well as wahoo to a whopping 56 pounds. Not a bad day for the new guy. Yellowtail fisherman are still finding good success on the edge of the reef. Tons of chum and some patience and you'll get 'em.



Backcountry fishing has been good and steady. Snook continue to be an attraction to anglers willing to go deep into the backcountry armed with bug spray and a bunch of live bait. The snook move from the back-water creeks and lakes on the mainland this time of year to spawn in the open waters of the Gulf and the ocean. It makes for easy pickings for anglers looking to enjoy a little catch and release fishing for these spectacular fish.

Ocean side bonefishing is consistently productive. Fish up to 13 pounds can be found cruising shorelines for shrimp and crabs. If you're not fly fishing, keep a crab ready just in case you run into a permit along the way. Permit are likely to pop up just about anywhere this time of year.

Tarpon just won't seem to go completely away. They are on the downswing, but there are still good numbers of fish out there. The northbound migrating fish are still doing their thing on

the ocean side for sight fisherman willing to stake out and wait. Anglers haven't had to wait very long to get some shots. Bait fisherman using crabs and pinfish early and late seem to still be scoring a few bites a trip.

Grab your fishing gear or your lobster stuff or both. Summer in the Keys is about family, hot weather and great memories. The important thing is to get out on the water when you can this time of year and have some fun.