

What's it gonna be, Hon?

By: Captain Ted Wilson

The weather in mid-April is always a guessing game. Recently we've had rain, wind, cold, hot, calm and drought. I think the only thing we've missed out on is hail. The fish are a little confused. One day they act like spring has sprung, the next day they're holed up like Punxsutawney Phil. The good news is we can probably scratch cold off of the list of weather possibilities for the next seven months. Here's what we can expect for the near future.

Tarpon are on the move and they're moving our way. Good numbers of fish have been in town for the last few weeks and more are sure to come. Bait fishermen should look for places with current, cover and food. Cover can mean many things. Local bridges are the most obvious answer, but don't just camp out there. Above average depth can satisfy a tarpon's need for cover and can spread them throughout any channel that connects the ocean and the bay. The tarpon have mullet on their mind right now, but they are the eternal opportunist. Pinfish, crabs, grunts, blue runners and even catfish with their spines broken off can work. Float them under corks with at least 80-pound test monofilament leaders and you've got a chance. Fly fishermen have been getting shots deep in the backcountry at laid-up and daisy-chaining fish. The migratory "push" of tarpon generally found on the oceanside should start soon, but as of yet is not worth the wait.

Bonefish have been making a showing. Mornings and evenings have been the best time to find tailing fish. Afternoons are still mild and the water is staying tepid, so the possibility of finding fish exists all day. During periods of high sun, look for fish in a little bit deeper water off the edge of flats. When bonefish are feeding in deeper water, the most obvious clue to their presence are the "muds" that they make as they root around the bottom. Muds can be seen from a distance, but keep in mind a mud is where the fish *was*, not where the fish is presently. It's kind of like a game of connect the dots. Look for a direction the muds are "popping" up and try to establish a pattern. If you absolutely can't make out the actual fish, then take your best guess and put your bait or fly out in front of the most recent, darkest mud you can see and say a short prayer. The best case scenario is using the muds to help get a visual on the actual fish's body and sight fish to it with the confidence of knowing exactly where the fish is and where to cast. Fish in deeper water can be a little more wreckless than when they are in tailing depth water. Cast and hope does work in deeper water where the details are a little blurry. The same technique almost never works in shallow water and actually can ruin opportunities due to spooking (affectionately known as "bombing") a fish with a presentation that is too close and they swim away.

"Action" fishing is very good right now. Action or "catch fish" fishing is when anglers lower their sights a bit and concentrate on making sure they catch something and hopefully lots of 'em. Two places almost certain to fit the bill are Flamingo and the near-shore patch reefs. Flamingo anglers can expect a hearty ride through Everglades National Park up to the mainland. There they can hope to catch snook, redfish, tarpon, sharks, and seatrout. It's a great day and even if aforementioned species are not cooperating, there are many other species back there that can pull some line. The patch reefs are perfect for anglers that only have a half day to play with but want to catch some fish. Keep in mind, windy days are a little tough for skiff fisherman to get to the "patches". When the wind is down, expect to catch a variety of snapper and grouper along with mackerel, jacks, and if your lucky, hogfish. Both of these types of fishing are great for all skill levels of anglers and usually provide plenty of action and some good table fare if that is your choice.

Even though the weather is a bit unpredictable this time of year, it is still one of the best times to fish in the Keys. In terms of available species of fish, all the players are here in April. Go see the show.