

## **Worm food for thought...**

The keys are slowing down for the summer. Traffic on the road and water has dwindled to tolerable levels. Hotels have some vacancy and you can actually walk-in and get a table at the restaurants in town that we all know and love. Most businesses are seeing the signs of an end to what was a very good season. Fishing guides in late June can be likened to marathon runners that either have just crossed the finish line or have just a mile or two to go. Our race is over for now and we're tired. Our boats are tired. Our equipment is tired. Strangely, the anglers that have flocked to the water in search of "the big one" for the last six months are leaving just in time to miss some of the best fishing of the year.

Bonefishing just gets better and better. Ocean and bayside flats will both hold some of the largest numbers of fish for the year. Permit will be roaming the deeper edges of the same bonefish spots as well as hovering over structure in large schools. Tarpon are still solid in the backcountry and starting to head north on the ocean side. For fly casters on the ocean side that means happy, down sun, right-handed 11 o'clock shots. A nice change from twisted up, awkward back hand casts that most mortal anglers struggle with a little bit.

The tarpon seem to be happy after the palalo worm hatch last week. For those who have no idea what a palalo worm is, I'll try to enlighten you. A quick disclaimer: I'm not a marine biologist. What you are about to read is a combination of fact and speculation based on observations of nutty tarpon fishermen whose brains at times are a little sun burned. With that said, the palalo worm is about two-inches long with a small "collar" near their head and approximately the same color of your garden variety earth worm. They hatch in the evenings and squiggle near the surface around the full moon in May or June. There are a few other variables that you'll have to figure out yourself. You'll see that pinning down exactly "when" and "where" the hatch is going to take place is most of the battle. You see, even armed with all the "facts" about this mysterious phenomenon you're still at the mercy of Mother Nature. The worms have a way of hatching for no particular reason or not hatching when everything looks right. Fly fishermen come from all over the world in hopes to catch the fabled "worm hatch." The truth is but few people will ever get to see it. So, why you may ask, do people go to great lengths to get a glimpse of a seemingly insignificant, relatively unattractive worm? The tarpon absolutely love them. When the planets align and the worms hatch, the tarpon seem to have anticipated it and go nuts gorging themselves on the tiny wigglers until the hatch is over. It usually lasts only a few hours. Fishermen who find themselves at the glorious right place, at the right time, tell stories of tarpon behaving more like a rainbow trout sipping insects from the surface punctuated by the occasional small explosive strikes like when they're popping shrimp.

Some say the worm hatch is one of the reasons the tarpon migrate to the keys in the first place. There is much we need to learn about tarpon and their behaviors, not only so we can catch more of them, but to preserve this awesome fish for generations of anglers to come. Maybe somewhere in their quirky addiction to the tiny palalo worm lie some clues as to why they have roamed through the Keys for millions of years. Maybe they just like the taste of them. Either way, hopefully some day you will catch yourself in the middle of a worm hatch and rest assured it is something you will never ever forget.