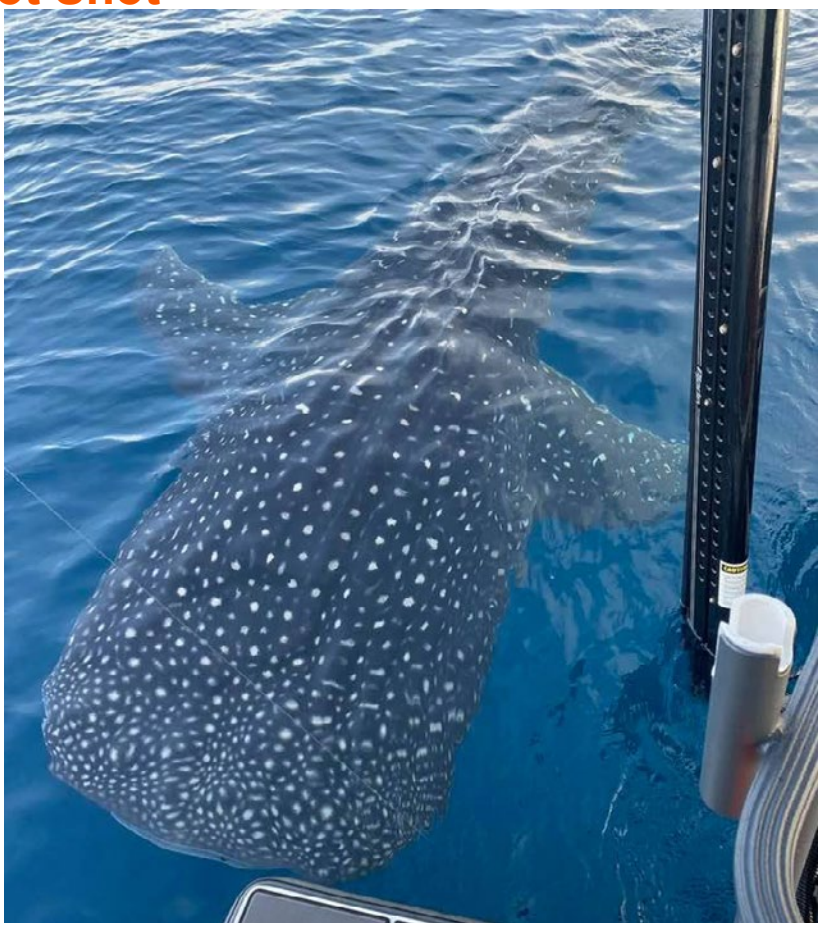
The Acute Angler

June, 2021
Volume 54, Number 6

The monthly newsletter of the Gainesville Offshore Fishing Club

June Hot Shot



Just when you thought you'd seen it all!

One of the great things about fishing is that you just never know what sort of amazing things you'll encounter out on the water. Local fisherman, Richard Feagle, certainly wasn't expecting to meet a whale shark when he left Suwannee in search of red snapper earlier this month, but here's the photo he took later that day. The gentle giant even gave the boat a bit of a nudge as if it wanted to be sure that its arrival hadn't gone unnoticed!

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President's Corner

By Mark Haberman,
GOFC President

Mother nature strikes again!! After attempting to hold our annual spring tournament twice, in the end, mother nature prevailed. Due to high winds we had to cancel our 2021 spring tournament this year.

I'm happy to put May in the rearview mirror and looking forward to June for several big reasons. June tends to bring in more stable weather. Winds tend to lay down but you need to be on the lookout for pop up thunderstorms. Another big reason to be excited about June? Gag grouper and red snapper seasons open up. I know myself and crew are stoked to fill the fish box with delicious grouper and snapper! Need another reason to be excited about June? Covid-19 infection rates are plummeting, mask mandates have been removed, and post pandemic life is starting to return to normal. We'll be getting back to our monthly meetings at the UF Vet Medicine School in the very near future. As always, be sure to watch your email, Facebook, and our website for upcoming details.

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Upcoming Events

In-Person Meetings Returning in August

The GOFC board is excited to announce that in-person meetings will resume again in August at the University of Florida Vet School. We've already got some high-profile speakers lined up to help us get started on the right foot! Look for more details in the coming weeks.

2021 CCA Banquet and Auction

The Gainesville Chapter of the Coastal Conservation Association will hold their annual banquet and auction on Thursday, September 9th 2021 at Legacy Park in Alachua. This year's event is being held in a new, bigger venue and will feature a catered dinner by Wahoo Seafood, live music, raffles, silent auction, live auction, and more! The event is always well attended by GOFC members and this year will be no different. Tickets can be purchased here: CCA Banquet Tickets

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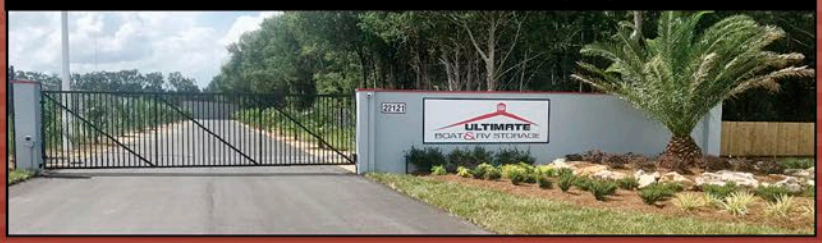

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Hal Wilson

By Jay Peacock

Longtime club member and friend to all Hal Wilson passed away on April 4th of this year. Hal served on the GOFC Board of Directors for many years and held a variety of positions including President, Vice President and Tournament Chairman. One of the fishing club jobs that Hal enjoyed doing for many years was running the club raffles at meetings. This gave him the opportunity to meet and greet folks as they entered the meeting room where he always made visitors and new club members feel welcome. Hal always had a warm sincere smile and handshake for everyone that came through those doors.

Hal was a great fisherman and I had the privilege of fishing with him many times. We were both mostly offshore fishermen at the time so most of our trips revolved around targeting grouper, cobia, red snapper or amberjack depending on the season. Hal was one of the best grouper fishermen I have known and would out-fish everyone on the boat most of the time. Hal won many tournament and annual contest awards over the years culminating with the John Ellett award.

Hal was a great friend to all of us and we will miss him. An obituary for Hal can be found at: https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/gainesville/obituary.aspx?n=hal-moore-wilson&pid=198330443

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Bucket List Action Item Checked Off!

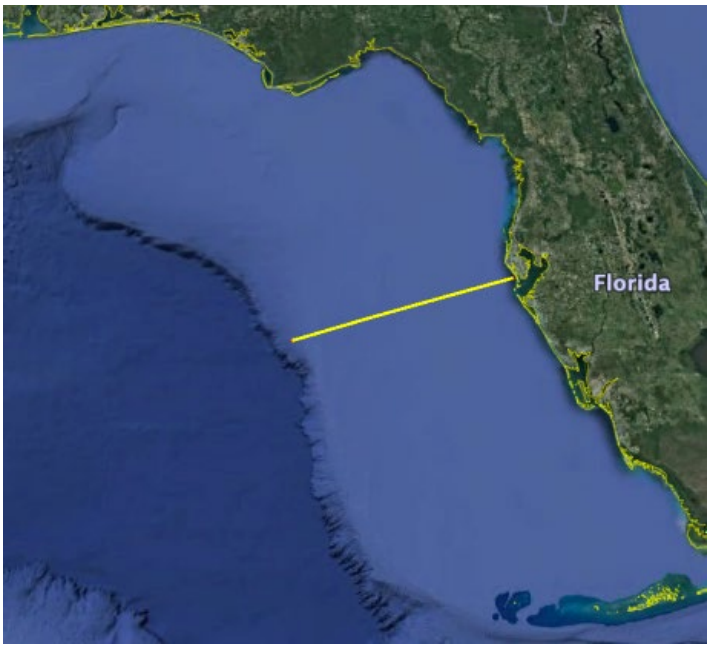
By John Richard

I joined GOFC a few years ago, and the guest speaker at the first meeting I went to was discussing Billfishing all over the world. I remember leaning over to my friend Chic and mentioning that this information is useless for the Gulf waters we fish in. After the meeting I started thinking that in the last few years I have not really had a "bucket list" goal, so I started researching how and where to catch Billfish in our local waters. The speaker at the meeting did mention that Billfish can be found anywhere there is deep clear blue water and I knew there was some way out there. In my research I found an article in Marlin Magazine that said:

"Ever dreamed of trolling virtually unfished waters, past marlin and tuna that have never seen a lure or heard the rumble of a sport-fisher's engines? Where a robust bluewater current caroms across impressive bottom structure, with depths plummeting from 850 feet to more than 10,000 feet in just 8 nautical miles? and all this with no passport or foreign languages required. Pack your bags (and all the spare fule you can carry) for a true offshore adventure, Florida Style"

Well, this article secured my fate.

I decided that being in my 50's, I wanted more comfort than racing offshore while being banged around in a center console with bladder tanks in the way, and bean bags to sleep on. So, I opted for getting a yacht with 4 berths and 3 bathrooms, literally a condo on the water. I then converted it to a yachtfish by adding lots of rod holders, outriggers, live well, electric reels, and even a dive tank compressor. I did a bunch of trips to places like the Middle Grounds, Abacos, Marquesas, Deep Drops, etc., with my eye on the prize…. Billfish from my home port in St. Petersburg!



The continental shelf is over 130 nM (150 statute mile) offshore, so a trip like this takes some preparation, and a good weather window. When a high pressure system is expected to be stationary for a few days in the Gulf, it's time to fire up the engines. That is exactly what we did on a Friday morning in June we headed West with the first stop at the Elbows which is similar to the middle grounds with rocky outcroppings and high-relief ledges that are only around 150 feet

deep on the top, so we could anchor and get a good night's sleep. The next morning I woke one of my crew members at 3:00am to help pull the anchor. We headed further west for a few hours and stopped to deep drop on an area known as the Sticky Grounds right at dawn in around 500 feet depth. We caught a bunch of nice Red Porgies and Scamp Grouper, but none of the monster ARS (American Red Snapper) that I have caught there in the past. Tom Jaworski (GOFC board member) hooked something huge that doubled the pool cue rod and strained the electric reel for the 30 yards or so that he managed to get it up from the bottom when all of a sudden the 60lb braid snapped. You could see the excitement and despair in his eyes as he tried to figure out what went wrong.

It was finally time to head west further to the prime Pelagic waters which is in an area locals call "The Box". No one I knew seemed to have GPS numbers for "The Box", and then finally someone told me to just look for the big red box on the charts…. duhhh.

Our plan was to go after the coveted Swordfish, but on the way there we stopped at a big weed patch and loaded the cooler with Mahi just using a hook with squid and casting near the patch. After this the boat looked like a mass murder had taken place in the cockpit, but we decided we could clean it up later, since we were at our 1200 foot depth in The Box where we had targeted for the Swords.

We dropped a couple of lines to the bottom with huge squid that we rigged on the way there. No luck, but we did successfully deploy the baits without tangles on the way down which is a feat in itself considering the 8lb sinkers with 15ft leaders going down 1200ft like a rocket. It helps to have someone bumping the engine in and out of gear to keep the baits off the line as you thumb the reel to slow the decent. Alas, the Swords just weren't there, but a huge thresher shark visited and circled the boat a few times just to let us know he was ever present. After a few hours, we pulled the baits up, cleaned up the bloody cockpit and had a nice fried grouper dinner, just drifting around on the flat calm ocean.

After dark we changed the rigs for night Swordfishing. During the day, Swords are generally on the bottom searching for food, but at night they commonly head up the water column to feed in less than 300 feet. We deployed a large Drogue to control and slow the drift of the boat, and sent out a top line using a gallon water jug as a bobber with some glow sticks in it so we could monitor for a bite. The bait was about 15 feet below the surface with a 1lb weight and a bright green light. It had an ominous glow as we set it out with the current about 40 yards from the boat. We also put another bait down 100 feet with a light attached to the weight and our rigged squid on a 15 foot 300lb leader. Now it was the waiting game, so we set some folding chairs on the front deck with a drink in hand and a lot of stories were told.

About 2 hours later, I noticed that the deep line's light seemed to be moving away from the direction of the current, so I scurried to the rod and set the hook. I yelled, "FISH ON" and the mayhem started with everyone busy reading the tangled flying gaff, and clearing lines. The fight did not seem very long, with only one run from the fish. The electric reel made quick work of it, but we think the fish may have been hindered by the way the line wrapped around his mouth and bill. Since these fish have sharp swords for bills, they are quite dangerous to land, so we used the flying gaff and a near perfect jab retired him quickly and humanely. One thing I think we all agreed on is that catching a swordfish is a team effort that we experienced together and will never forget since for most of us it was our first battle with a Sword.

After all the excitement, the winds started to blow, and by the next morning we had a 15 knot steady wind

with gusts to 20 knots. The seas picked up to 5+ feet, but since it was a westerly blow, the seas were following providing a nice ride home, except for the brief thunder storm we tried to outrun that eventually caught up with us when we stopped to try for some ARS in shallower water. It was not much more than a nuisance, since there is a dry second nav station in the salon.

I am sure this will not be the only time I will head way out West when the weather permits. Maybe next time targeting Marlin and Yellowfin Tuna. I think we broke off on a big Yellowfin when we briefly trolled a cedar plug on the International 50vsw with 80 lb mono as we repositioned at sunset for the evening drift. He was definitely the big one that got away, but I think that's a prerequisite for all fishing tales.

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FWC Updates

When releasing deep-water fish, the right tools mean everything

Will you be fishing for snapper or grouper on your next fishing trip? Continue your role as a conservationist by paying close attention to signs of barotrauma and being prepared to respond. Barotrauma is a condition seen in many fish caught at depths greater than 50 feet and is caused by pressure changes leading to an expansion of gases in the swim bladder. It is important to treat barotrauma in fish you do not intend to keep. Signs of barotrauma include the stomach coming out of the mouth, bloated belly, distended intestines and bulging eyes.

Barotrauma can cause damage to internal organs and be fatal unless appropriate steps are taken to mitigate its effects. It is important to know in advance what tools are available and how to use them to help fish return to the bottom and increase their chances of survival.

Descending devices take fish back down to a depth where increased pressure from the water will recompress swim bladder gases. They fall into three categories: mouth clamps, inverted hooks and fish elevators. With proper set-up and practice, descending devices can be easy to use and make a big impact on the survival of released fish. Learn more about descending devices and how to use them at MyFWC.com/SaltwaterFishing by clicking on the "Descending Devices" playlist.

Venting tools are sharpened, hollow instruments that treat barotrauma by releasing expanded gas from the swim bladder, enabling fish to swim back down to depth.

REMINDER: items such as fillet knives, ice picks, screwdrivers and gaffs are not venting tools and should never be used to vent a fish. Venting a fish incorrectly can cause more harm than good.

To properly vent, lay the fish on its side (on a cool, wet surface). Venting tools should be inserted 1-2 inches behind the base of the pectoral fin, under a scale at a 45-degree angle, just deep enough to release trapped gasses. Never insert venting tools into a fish's belly, back or stomach that may be protruding from the mouth. Learn how to vent properly by visiting YouTube.com/watch?v=jhkzv1_2Bpc.

Descending devices and venting tools should only be used when fish show one or more signs of barotrauma and cannot swim back down on their own. It is essential to work quickly when using these tools and return the fish to the water as soon as possible. Anglers should choose the device and method they are most comfortable with and that best fits the situation.

Anglers should also use proper gear when fishing for reef fish. Circle hook and/or dehooking tool requirements apply to anglers fishing for reef fish in Florida. Non-stainless steel, inline (non-offset) circle hooks with the barb crimped down often hook in the mouth rather than the gut, making it easier to release fish. Dehooking tools also help quickly release fish so you can get back to fishing for that big one in no time. Using the right tools and acting quickly will make a big difference in the survival of fish you release, ultimately helping to conserve Florida's world-renowned fisheries for the future. For details about reef fish gear requirements for circle hooks and dehooking tools, visit MyFWC.com/Marine and click on "Recreational Regulations," then click "Gear Rules" under the Reef Fish tab.

To learn more about proper fish handling techniques, visit MyFWC.com/FishHandling. Check out our descending devices playlist to learn more about barotrauma, descending devices and venting tools. Visit our YouTube channel at MyFWC.com/SaltwaterFishing for more saltwater fishing how-to videos. For answers to questions, contact 850-487-0554 or Marine@MyFWC.com.

Recent Catches

Angler	Species	Weight	Date Caught	Location	Lure/Bait
Rhonda Horn	Spanish Mackeral	2 lbs 1 oz	5/1/2021	Keaton Beach	Stretch 20
Ed Ellett	Spanish Mackeral	2 lbs 10 oz	5/16/2021	Crystal River	Gulp
Ed Ellett	Spanish Mackeral	4.08lbs	5/27/2021	Seahorse Reef	Jig
Austin Mundt	Flounder	15oz	5/29/2021	Crystal River	Mid minnow
William Mundt	Bluefish	2lb 3oz	5/29/2021	Crystal River	Gulp
Austin Mundt	Redfish	1lb 10oz	5/30/2021	Crystal river	Live shrimp

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Saltwater Fishing Report - March 18, 2021

By Gary Simpson

Doug Johnson's eighteenth Reeling for Kids Saltwater Challenge is in the books and, as usual, the salty shootout produced lots of great catches.

Young Tipton LaPerle led the Junior Angler Offshore winners with his 30.30-pound kingfish. Dillon Moss secured second place with a 14.65 gag grouper, and Jeremiah Dowling's 13.55 gag grouper was good for third place.

Junior Angler Inshore winners all scored with redfish. Shane Keegan's 4.70-pounder was the winner, while Branson Johns' 4.45 red took second and David Crawford's 4.00 earned him third place.

The Lady Angler Offshore winners were topped by Addison Knox and her 19.25 red snapper. Kelsey Wable wrestled in a 19.00 gag grouper for second, followed by Jane Laughlin's 11.95 gag.

In the Lady Angler Inshore division, Brittany English reigned with a 4.90 redfish, Skyler Hanna had a 4.70 red, and Amanda Bailey followed with a 3.90 red.

Winners were packed closely in the Trout category. Doyle Hewitt won with a 4.90, and Jason Witherspoon was second with a 4.60. With a 4.55-pound trout, Bradley English claimed third place.

The Redfish category saw a rare runaway winner, as Matt Cowart boated the red of the weekend at 7.40. Ronnie Arnold followed with a 6.05, and Charlie McCallister's 5.85 was the third-best red.

The Spanish Mackerel winners were separated by just a few ounces. James Lovvorn won with a 3.95, Rick Pena had a 3.85, and Shawn Simmons' 3.70 mack gave him the third-place money.

There were just two Cobia taken to the weigh scales.

Doyle Hedgecock's 38.65 lb winning gag grouper

Jeremy Witt won easily with a good 42.15-pounder, while Dwayne Harrington's 23.65 was the second-place ling.

Jeff Theiman weighed a 43.80-pound crowd-pleaser for the win in the Kingfish category. Chris Topping and Kaleb Beckner followed with big kings of 41.75 and 37.35.

In the Grouper category, Doyle Hedgecock boated an impossibly huge 38.65-pound gag. Dan Sherraden's 31.85 and Mikel English's 26.60 were the second and third-best gags.

Another jaw-dropper was a winner in the Red Snapper category, as Garrett Morrow presented the weighmaster with a massive, colorful 32.85-pound beauty. Dan Sherraden had the number two red snapper at 20.70, and Frank Sheffield's 18.25 took third.

Garrett Morrow set a new tournament record with this 32.85 lb Red Snapper

In the Reeling for Kids tournament, the Master's winners earn the biggest paychecks and claim the greatest bragging rights. These are the teams with the heaviest combined weight of three designated species.

The 2021 Master's Inshore champions were Rick Pena and his Rick's Rods Team. Their redfish/trout/Spanish mackerel trio totaled 11.55-pounds. The Shawn Simmons Team finished close behind with an 11.25 total, and the Matt Cowart Team tallied a 10.95 total.

The Master's Offshore champions were the Dan Sherraden Team. Their red snapper/grouper/kingfish trio totaled 78.50-pounds. The Kaleb Beckner Team was second with a 69.10 total. The Chris Topping Team had a three-fish total of 68.50 to claim third place.

As always, The Reeling for Kids Saltwater Challenge attracted the some of the gulf's top sport fishers while amassing considerable revenue for the Boys and Girls Club of Alachua County.

Ed Ellett, CPCU, CLU, CIC

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