The Acute Angler

February, 2023
Volume 56, Number 2

The monthly newsletter of the Gainesville Offshore Fishing Club

February Hot Shot

Why we fish.

It's not always about the biggest fish **we** caught. Sometimes it's just the joy and pride passing it on to the next generation:

Picture to the right is your new Editor's (at that time 12 year old daughter, Savanna) holding a nice Gag she caught all by herself on past president Dave Perry's boat.

Not sure who is happier...

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President's Corner

It's only February and we're already off to a great start!

We had a solid turnout at our first meeting in January. Thanks to Ed Ellet for going over the rules of the Ellet Contest and to our Elite Anglers for sharing their strategies for success when competing in the contest. Remember that prizes are awarded for each species in addition to the overall prize, so it's never too late in the year to get involved in the Ellet Contest. If you catch a nice fish, go ahead and enter it using the fish entry form on the website and you just might get your name etched into club history!

Thanks to Allen Turner for certifying member's scales during the January meeting. Members are asked to have their scales certified by the club each year to ensure accuracy when weighing fish for club contests. If you'd like to have your scale certified but forgot to bring it to the January meeting, send me an email at president@gofc.us and we'll work out a way to get it certified for you. Personal scales that have been certified by the club are sufficient for use in weighing fish for the Ellet Contest, but please remember that in order to qualify for an all-time club record, fish must be weighed on a scale that has been certified by the Florida Department of Agriculture.

The Club held its annual oyster roast on January 27th at the Pedersen's place in Trenton and it was a massive success by all accounts. Virgil sourced some truly amazing oysters from Maryland for us and to say it was all you can eat would be an understatement! In addition to the seemingly never-ending supply of live oysters, there were fried oysters, smoked meats, burgers, clam chowder, jalapeno fish poppers, and lots of awesome side dishes and desserts. Thanks to our head chef Virgil and all those who contributed to the feast, and thanks to Tim and Linda for hosting us at their beautiful property. It was a night to be remembered!

February is a great time of year to show your boat a little TLC and make sure it's all set for heavy use in the coming months. With that in mind, our Speakers Committee has booked Tommy Durham of Backwater 2 Bluewater as our featured speaker at the February meeting. Tommy is a master mechanic and all-around guru of boat maintenance. Tommy will talk about bringing a new high-end boat dealership and service center to the heart of Gainesville and answer all of your questions related to boat and outboard maintenance. Don't miss it!

We also have our annual Sheepshead Shootout coming up Saturday, March 4th. Since the sheepshead tend to congregate in very well-known spots just off-shore, and because prizes for this tournament are awarded on a per-boat basis, this usually ends up being the most social tournament of the year. It's it not uncommon to have several heavily crewed GOFC boats all fishing within heckling distance of each other. It's a ton of fun and a great one for bringing out the entire family!

So much to look forward to!

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From the Editor

Many thanks to 2022 Editor Jeff Gartland who is moving back to Texas. He was a huge help to the Club with his efforts to produce this monthly update to the members of the GOFC. If you can pass him a line wishing him and his wife well I am sure he will appreciate it.

Well new editor John Ebbs here, I will try my best to fill some big shoes. I have spend some time away from the club and fishing as I focused on finishing up a work career and am happy to say I retired on 1/3/23! Did spend some of my kids inheritance and got a boat worthy of some middle ground trips. Hope to share some of those adventures with you!

Hopefully you will bear with us as we get ramped up in delivering the 2023 editions of the Acute Angler.

Annual Seafood Banquet and Awards Ceremony GOFC's biggest social event of the year! Each year the club gathers to celebrate the winners of the year long Ellett Contest and the annual photo contest and to enjoy lots of delicious seafood. This year the banquet will include Maine lobster tail, snow crab legs, shrimp, clam chowder, grits, and baked beans. The club will also supply bottled water and sodas. Please remember that bringing alcohol to this City owned facility is prohibited. The good news is that the clubhouse has a fully stocked cash bar with very reasonable prices!

The Banquet will be held this Friday, February 17 at Ironwood Golf Course. We are asking our members to contribute $20/ person to attend. Children under 18 are free. Everyone is encouraged to bring a dessert for sharing. A panel of expert GOFC dessert tasters will award a $100 prize for the best dessert.

Tickets $20 per adult and can be purchased at the door. This event is only open to GOFC members in good standing. Now is a great time to renew your membership for 2023 if you haven't done so already! Just click on this link to open the renewal page in a separate window: https://gofc.us/join-now/

Upcoming Events

February 17, 2023 - Seafood Banquet and Awards Ceremony, starting at **6:30 PM** in the clubhouse of **Ironwood Golf Course in Gainesville** at **2100 NE 39th Avenue**

February 28, 2023—Monthly Meeting—The featured speaker at the February meeting will be Tommy Durham of **Backwater 2 Bluewater** at the Veterinary Academic Building .Tommy Durham is the General Manager of Backwater 2 Bluewater boat dealership and service facility in Gainesville. Tommy, a master mechanic and master marine electrician, will talk about boat and trailer maintenance as well as Backwater 2 Bluewater's exciting plans for developing the Gainesville location on NW 23rd Street into a truly premier boat dealership. Following his talk, Tommy will take questions from the audience. Fellowship begins at 7:00 pm and the meeting proper begins at 7:30.

March 4th, 2023—Annual Sheepshead Shootout Tournament. Weight in at Robinson Seafood Market just outside of Cedar Key (See note on good locations from Chic next to this)

March 28th, 2023—Monthly Meeting UF Vet Med VAB Auditorium

February is time to renew your GOFC Membership!

It's now easier than ever!

Just go to the "Join now!" tab on the GOFC website.

(http://www.gofc.us/wp/join-now/)

Then fill out the form online and

Note from Chic: The most popular areas for sheepshead are the Drydock, GOFC reefs 1 & 2, Steel Tower, and the Pit. For those who haven't been to the Drydock, it's debris covers an area about the size of a football field. Be forewarned that Drydock loves to steal your tackle, anchor and rope. If you're a member in good standing and want coordinates for any of these locations send me an email at: (newsletter@gofc.us).

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The Captain's Log

By Joe Richard

February Alternatives

. February has a few decent daytime high tides on the Gulf Coast, usually during full and then dark of the moon periods, but matching those days with decent weather and a lack of fog isn't easy. Only yesterday I had to reschedule a charter out of Steinhatchee. At the time, Gainesville temps were in the 80s with blue sky. However, a quick look at the Steinhatchee Web Cam (mounted on Roy's Restaurant) revealed it was so foggy you couldn't see across the river… I told the guy "No way," and we delayed the trip until after the next cold front, which blew the sea fog away.

We've had some nice Gulf catches during February in recent years. In 2022, Amy and I went out in nice weather and had a big score on upper slot redfish and oversized trout. And the February before that, I had a charter angler catch a 26-inch trout, a future tournament winner carefully released. The tide was low all morning, nothing on the grass flats offshore, not even a pinfish, but when the tide returned inshore the action began. He was from Brazil and didn't speak a word of English, but we got along fine. (In recent years I've had charter clients from eight countries, including Korea, Ukraine, Poland and Iran, but they all spoke good English.)

When it comes to Gulf fishing in February I'm more cautious these days, waiting until conditions are decent, instead of suffering through various surprises and discomforts from winter fishing.

An easier option for fishing this month is to grab light tackle and (gasp!) go freshwater. We'll ease out to one of our local lakes on sunny afternoons when we can actually fish barefoot. As it turns out, February is prime crappie time, the perfect month to slow down and admire the scenery. Watch a bobber go under and catch a bunch of fish. In February 2021, we logged 196 crappie during eight February trips.

GOFC members may not realize it, but there is an entire subculture of crappie fishermen in our area, and they prefer the term "speck" when describing these fish. By fortune or luck, Gainesville is located in the most productive region for crappie in all of Florida. A recent email from FWC's crappie biologist told me that Florida's top region includes Newnan's, Orange, Lochloosa, Rodman and Santa Fe Lakes, all of which are a short drive for Gainesville fishermen, compared to either coast. As February progresses, these fish move closer to shorelines until some are literally in the woods, where water depth permits. Most of the guys who pursue these fish all year long were once offshore fishermen who kept big boats on the coast. Some of these guys I know have surpassed 80 years of age and they *still* keep going, but it's the local lakes that sustains them all year long. No more blue water whitecaps, for these guys.

It's certainly cheaper, especially using 1/16 ounce plastic jigs, the ideal bait for crappie.

A jonboat with three gallons of gas and a small electric motor is all that is needed. Almost any light tackle will do; even a Zebco outfit will reel in crappie. I favor ultra-light 4-foot spin outfits to get the most out of every fish, and also stiff, 8-foot spin outfits for long casts or probing bonnet vegetation like a cane-pole. You want *limp*, six-pound line such as Stren makes, to make that jig pivot and dance. Serious anglers who rack up thousands of crappie ever year prefer early mornings, while I go from 1-4 p.m. on warm afternoons. A three-hour tour on a quiet lake can yield a limit of fish, which is 25 per day.

Taste varies from lake to lake, with Newnan's crappie tasting more muddy compared to others. I generally release those fish, or give away a pail full to local folks fishing from the shoreline or pier near Newnan's ramp, which is Powell Park. Fishing around cypress trees is a great way to slow down and get back to Nature during winter's worst month. On Newnan's I've seen big turkeys with long beards silently file by in the shadows. Sometimes you hear Motown music from a nearby boat. That's a pleasant change from Texas coastal boats I have observed, with their expensive sound systems broadcasting ACDC near and far. (Yes, we all miss Bon Scott, but their new guy sounds like demonic screeching).

Anyway, when March finally returns, it's back to the Gulf of Mexico for another year and tour of duty. First priority will be sheepshead, to notch that category on the GOFC's Top Ten list. By April, it might be too late to find a good-sized specimen.

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FWC Catch a Florida Memory

By Tom Jaworski

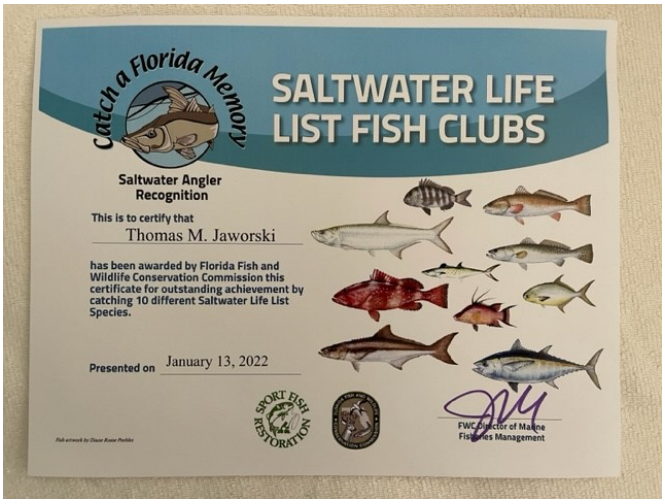
This is a Saltwater Angler Recognition Program that you can win prizes, for free. It is celebrating its 5th anniversary this year achieving more than 20,000 approved angler catches. There are three categories:

Reel Big Fish, Grand Slam and Saltwater Life List. There is also a raffle this year, called the triple threat throwdown. If you achieve all three categories your name will be entered into a raffle.

The program not only gives anglers a chance to win prizes but it also helps FWC learn more about the fisheries. A win- win! You do not need to harvest the fish, just take a picture and submit it with some details on the FWC website.

The Saltwater Fish Life List has recognition levels at 10-30-50 & 70. This is the easiest category as all you have to do is take a picture of any of the 70 species of fish and send it in. They will verify your catch and send you confirmation. Once you hit 10, you will receive a small prize package.

Currently I have 16 verified entries and working on getting to Life List Level 30, 50 and then 70 fish club, and I've only started entering fish less than two years ago. They will award you small prizes for each category. Also, your name gets published on the FWC website under the appropriate level as well as updates being listed in the Saltwater Recreational Fishing Regulations booklet (upon your reaching your next level. If you request, they will even send you a water resistant Life List so you can keep track of your species caught and entered.



The Saltwater Grand Slams require you to catch 3 specified species within a 24 hour period, and there is a small fry division for anglers under 15. You will receive a certificate signed by the Director of FWC Marine Fisheries, a colorful t-shirt and recognition in the Saltwater Recreational Fishing Regulations booklet and on the members' page. There are three tiers and there are 9 different types of slams: Small fry, Nearshore, Blue Water, Reefs and Rubble, Shoreline, Bay and Estuary, Florida, Inshore and Family Grand Slams. Too many fish to list them all here.

I would think a few of GOFC club members may qualify for this category already. As of today's date, I have not been lucky enough to land any of the three different species in a 24 hour period.

The Reel Big Fish requires you to measure the fish on a "qualifying measuring device" as well as the angler being in the photo with the fish. I have two honorable mentions, sheepshead and mangrove snapper. There are 30 species of fish

For the Reel Big Fish There are 30 species of fish eligible for this category. As a random sample, currently Bluefish is 27", gag grouper is 41".

Triple Threat Club Members are an anglers who have qualified for all three Catch a Florida Memory programs (Saltwater Grand Slams, Saltwater Fish Life List and Saltwater Reel Big Fish) They receive a dry fit shirt and are eligible for exclusive Triple Threat Opportunities.

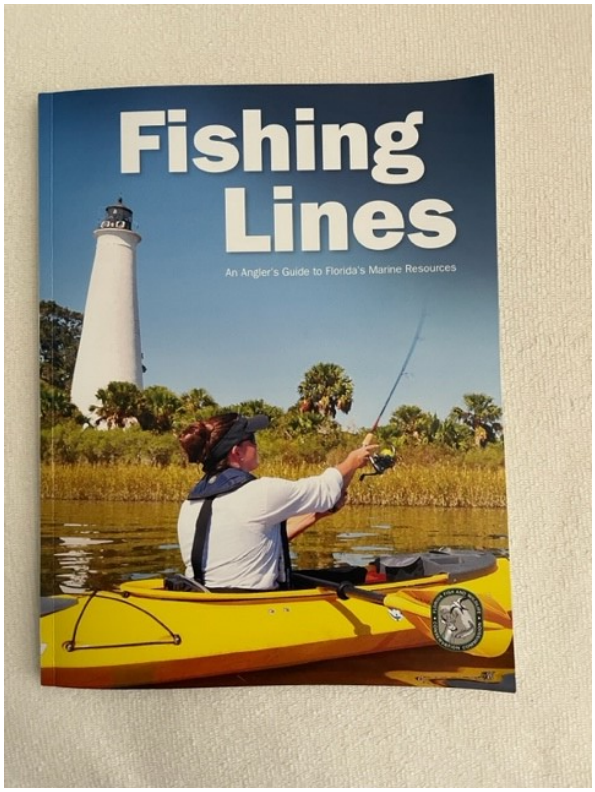
Triple Threat Throw down is for anglers who have met certain requirements, such as being a triple threat club member and having an eligible entry from one of the three categories. For more details see the FWC Website.

The prize this year is a SS127 series kayak from Bonafide fully loaded with accessory package from YakAttack The entry period is January 1,2023 and closes September 5, 2023 (EDT). As I read the rules, once you become a triple threat member, all you have to do is enter an eligible fish in one of the three other categories and your name will be entered into the raffle. But only once!

STAR Tournament

This tournament is sponsored by CCA. You are fishing for tagged fish and there are much more serious eligibility requirements. Most prominent is that you have to take a LIE DETECTOR test within a very short time period after catching the fish. You must battle and land the fish with minor help (i.e. only netting or gaffing). Someone else even touches your rod, you are disqualifies. There is an entry fee of $40 and even if you don't catch a tagged fish, you can still enter your fish and get put into a raffle. I did just that, entered a 26" non tagged grouper and won a 5 ft fish bag and fishing pliers. Now I have to target bigger fish! **Two of our club members each won a boat.** One was for a cobia and the other a redfish. I would think that for a tank of gas, this is a very worthwhile contest to enter. The dates for this year are May 27-September 4, 2023. Prize packages total $500,000. The cost is $75 which includes a one year membership in the CCA. They host a Banquet and Awards Ceremony where the prizes are handed out.

You must obtain an official Star Measuring Device (a water resistant paper tape measure) from many available marinas to photo and measure the fish on.



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Charlie's Kitchen

Chef Jean-Pierre's Shrimp Stir Fry

By Charlie Courtney

I follow Chef Jean-Pierre on YouTube and have really enjoyed his recipes — his videos

are informative, the food is delicious, and his enthusiasm is quite entertaining. This

shrimp stir fry is a relatively healthy, yet tasty, recipe that I have made several times.

Here is a link to the YouTube video in which he makes his shrimp stir fry:

Chef Jean Pierre's Shrimp Stir Fry on YouTube

And here is the recipe:

Ingredients

1 ½ pounds shrimp peeled, deveined, and cut in half lengthwise along the back like the

Chef did in the video

2 ounces butter

2 ounces garlic infused or pesto olive oil

2 tablespoons shallots or mild onions, chopped

About 2 cups zucchini, diced

About 2 cups yellow squash, diced

About 2 cups fresh tomatoes, diced

1½ tablespoon garlic, chopped

About 1½ cups chicken or vegetable stock

1 or 2 tablespoons cornstarch diluted in water, to use as needed

2 tablespoons parsley, chopped

Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions

Heat butter in a large sauté pan, wok, or skillet. When hot,

add the shrimp and sauté until almost cooked and lightly golden brown.

Remove the shrimp and reserve on the side. Add a little olive oil to the pan.

When hot, add the shallots and sauté for a minute or two.

Add the squash, zucchini, and tomatoes, cover the pot, and let them cook for about 6 to 7 minutes until they are cooked to your liking.

Add the garlic and sauté it for a minute. Then add the stock and bring to a simmer.

Adjust the consistency with a little cornstarch to make sure the sauce is not too liquid.

Add the parsley and adjust seasoning with salt and pepper just before serving.

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Marine Medicine Pearls

By Mark Rustemier M.D.

PEARL; Plan your skin cancer prevention, topical "PEEL" treatment for the winter months For the outdoor enthusiasts that has spent much of their youth and adulthood in the sun, their skin has paid the price. Not news to fishermen over 60. Not news to this German/Irish fisherman certainly, who has had several topical treatments over the last 10 years.

Without the benefit of current advancements including; SPF 50 sunscreens, neck gaiters, sun face masks , SPF rated fishing gloves and UV protection fishing apparel, the "mature" adult often finds that accumulated sun exposure turns into precancerous Actinic Keratosis AK (recurrent red scaley rough areas of skin). This accumulated sun damage, a large part of it before 24 years of age, presents as AK with up to 10% of lesions if left untreated progressing to skin cancer. There are several ways to treat AK including Cryotherapy (freezing with liquid nitrogen that feels like burning), Curettage (scraping), Phototherapy (topical solution applied then exposed to a special light), Laser therapy and prescription (chemotherapy) creams.

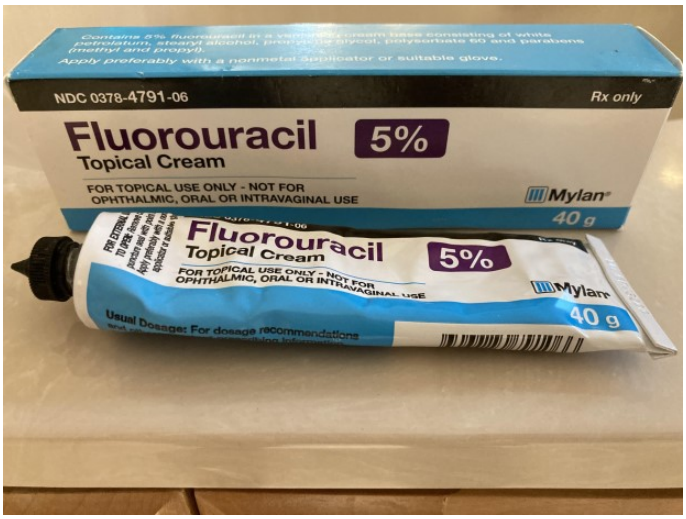
Most commonly for multiple AKs in Florida fishermen, a medicated cream like Efudex (fluorouracil), Aldara (imiquimod) or a pharmacy compounded combination of fluorouracil/calcipotriene (requires shorter treatment time) may be the best choice.

The prescription creams are effective when there are multiple AKs, where an entire "field" needs to be treated as opposed to just a single spot as with liquid nitrogen. The cream (topical chemotherapy) acts on the damaged cells and helps prohibit development into cancer cells. They largely target only the precancerous cells leaving the normal cells alone.

The treatment process however takes weeks and causes skin irritation. It is not fun….For instance, Efudex on the face is recommended twice a day for 2-3 weeks. Initially it is mild enough but after 5-7 days redness starts showing in the damaged areas. Adverse effects with topicals include inflammation, crusting, burning, scaling etc. as well as strange looks of fear and repulsion from other shoppers at Publix. There can be a painful lobster like transformation. Your significant other may not be as affectionate for a few weeks, but they will love the results.

It has been suggested by a GOFC spouse that an old pillow case may be of benefit. However topical treatment can be very effective and useful on the scalp, arms, hands as well as on the face. Although better to break up treating too many areas at once. Vaseline/ moisturizes help with the irritation and prescription steroids can be used if needed.

These topical medicated creams do require some perseverance. You also need to protect your skin during treatment from the sun and be vigilant in protecting your new "baby" skin after treatment. That is why it is most convenient to plan these treatments in the Winter. It is not a permanent one-time fix either but does set the clock back some. Further treatment and follow up with a physician may be needed and sometimes a maintenance regiment combining cryotherapy and topical treatment is indicated. There is also some medical rational to consider topical treatment earlier than traditionally recommended, starting for only mild sun damage (i.e., wrinkles, sun spots) with the goal of preventing AK as well as skin cancer.



So, take advantage of modern skin protection, especially with children, but if needed see your physician to discuss your AK treatment options. Keep in mind the whole process can take weeks and right now we are in our slower fishing months!

Dr. Mark

2023 GOFC Oyster Roast at the Pedersens

Understanding the Ellett Contest

With credit to Brian Kiel

Understanding the John Ellett Contest

The John Ellett contest is a club contest that runs one year long and pits club members against each other in a friendly fishing contest encompassing three categories: Men's, Women's and Elite. A simplified formula awards points on a relative basis based on the heaviest fish of each species, with the exception of amberjack and kingfish which are based on length. Each species category has a maximum of 25 points and points are totaled to give an overall Ellett standing. For example, if the heaviest trout entered was a 6 lb. trout, this trout would receive the maximum 25 points, while a trout weighing half of that weight (3 lb.) would receive half of the 25 points (12.5 pts.). A 1.5 lb. trout would receive 6.25 pts. Current Ellett standings are printed in the club's Acute Angler newsletter, magazine, and on the GOFC website (Ellett standings).

It's easy to participate in the contest. All that's required is that you submit a weigh slip of any or all of the ten species the club fishes for: spotted seatrout, redfish, flounder, sheepshead, cobia, kingfish, Spanish mackerel, greater amberjack, bluefish, and grouper. Any scale can be used to estimate the fish weight, however, when a fish exceeds the maximum weight for a particular species (see bottom of weigh slip under Heavy Catches), that fish must be weighed on a State certified scale like those found in commercial establishments that use a scale to determine the value of an item sold to the public. A fish house like Northwest Seafood in Gainesville will usually weigh fish, if asked nicely. The weight should be noted on a receipt or store weigh slip, signed by the individual weighing the fish, and attached to the GOFC weigh slip to be turned into the club. The club Weighmaster keeps a certified club scale at home for members to use (contact the GOFC Weighmaster/Record Keeper, weighslip@gofc.us).

To win the contest you don't have to catch the largest fish, just catch as many of the 10 species as you can (hopefully a couple will be heavy fish). Participation in club events also helps as points are awarded for participation in club Tournaments (2 pts.) and Funaments (1 pt.). Writing an article for the Acute Angler is worth 3 points.

Awards are given to three places with the top male & female angler receiving a coveted inscribed pewter plate from the Ellett family, who happen to have sponsored this contest since its inception. The Ellett contest dates run from January 1st to December 31st with awards given out during the March Awards Banquet.

In addition to the Ellett awards, the club also gives awards and recognition for the heaviest three fish of each species. The club also maintains a list of GOFC Record Catches that include 109 species, so keep any species that is either not noted or exceeds the record. You can also submit a weigh slip for one of the "Other Two" species (dolphin and tripletail) to be computed for a

Tim Pedersen
Gainesville Offshore Fishing Club
2022 John Ellett Top Angler Award Winner
Men's Division

A to Z with Tim Pedersen

A – Angler you most admire: My Dad

B – Biggest strength you have in fishing sport: Understanding where to fish and planning where to go

C – Chasing the 2022 John Ellett, Enjoyed fishing in the competition with other for the award.

D – Dream Fishing Trip: Fishing with people that are no longer with us.

E – EPIRB, cell phone, VHF radio or Guardian Angel for safety, and why?: The Epirb, keep with me at all times. Second-portable VHF.

F - Favorite fishing trip of 2022: Getting shrimp inshore and going offshore for grouper.

G - Getting the John Ellett, Top Angler award means: Achieving a goal in fishing

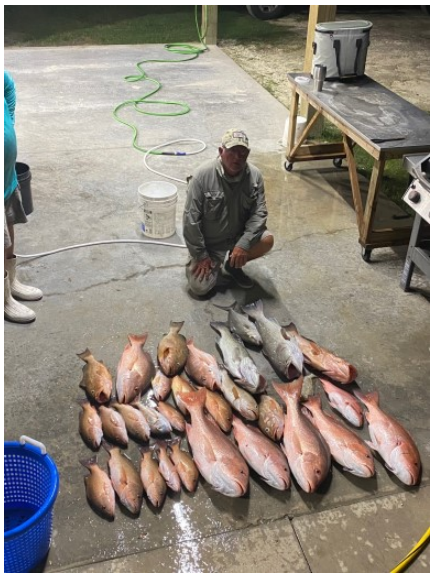
H - Hardest species of the Big Ten to catch: A legal cobia.

I - Idol: Anybody that is over 60 and can fish.

J – Juice, milk, coffee, Dramamine or a banana in the morning before your fishing trip : Glass of tea, breakfast sandwich on boat on the way out

K - Kind of shoes you wear on fishing trip: covered toe shoes

L - Last time you laughed out loud: Somebody driving over the rocks behind Dark Island. Not realizing that the rocks are there!



M - Movie you love: John Wayne-sones of Katie Elder

N - Nickname: None (that he knows of!)

O - Off the water hobby you enjoy: Gardening, welding and wood shop

P - Pre-fishing trip ritual: Making sure the gear is ready to go and checking the boat

Q - Quirky habit: Making sure lunch is on the boat

R - Rivalry at GOFC contest: My best buddy Virgil Cooper

S - Song you sing in the shower that could go to number 1 on the charts: None

T - Tarpon, Triple tail and Tuna – what do these, non Big Ten, non John Ellett Top Angler Award species mean to you: Love to catch Tripletail, would love to catch a tuna

U - Useless fact about you: Extra shoes and clothes in truck

V - Vocal GOFC fishing club member: We all are including myself, especially when it comes to fishing

W - Worst fishing experience of 2022: Going all the way to Cedar Key and the weather was bad. Then driving back home

X - X rays, cuts, human hookup fishing experiences: have not gone a year without getting a hook in my hand or finger

Y - Your best fishing buddy: Vigil Cooper.

Z - Zany thing this year's President, or a GOFC Board Member said to you: Cannot remember!

Staci (Sanders) Vining
Gainesville Offshore Fishing Club
2022 John Ellett Top Angler Award Winner
Women's Division

I guess you could call me saltwater fishing "rookie" but have been an avid competitor showing horses and dogs since I was a child. To say I am competitive is an understatement, I am probably too competitive! When I attended the awards banquet with Carl a few years back, I was ready to set a goal for myself to win the women's division for the Ellett Award.

To catch fish, you must be present, and I sure put in the hours on the water to catch my 5 species. I have always had issues with motion sickness and am working very hard to overcome so I can set my sights on the remaining species. I did venture off on a nice day to catch my Spanish Mackerel in my first-time trolling, that was exciting! I sure love to hear those reels sing!

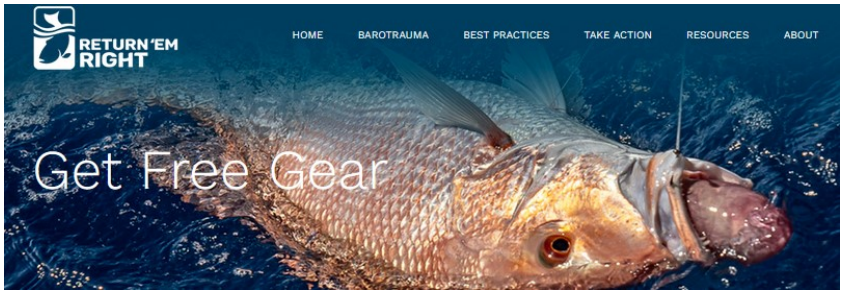
They say luck is where opportunity meets preparation, I would rather be lucky than skilled any day! I guess that is how I caught my sheepshead on a MirrOlure! When was reeling him in, Carl asked me what I had on the line and I said, "one of those fish with stripes", he just shook his head and smiled at me. I want to thank him for his patience and awesome guide skills. I also want to thank Timmy for always encouraging me and sharing a few of his secrets!

2022 was a big year for me, I married my fishing buddy, my boat captain, my fishing guide, my very best friend. Winning this award was the cherry on top!

Staci (Sanders) Vining

Items of Interest—Free Descending Device

"Return' Em Right" offers free descending devices



Most of us have reeled up a fish from depth with the stomach forced outside by an expanding bladder. We have also experienced the heartache of watching it float away on surface unable to dive after being released because it is undersize or out of season.

It's now a legal requirement (the DESCEND act) for anyone bottom fishing in the federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico to have a venting tool or descending device.

To educate anglers in responsible release practices the Return "Em Right program was started. Anglers can register for a 15 minute online review of best practices. Upon completion Return 'Em Right will send free of charge a kit with two descending devices, lead and all the tools you'll need. This is a $100 value and the right thing for anglers to do.

So you want to catch Red Grouper?

From the Editor

Years ago as I was learning about fishing our offshore waters I had a great chat with an old salt on a online forum about how to target Red Grouper. Since that time of year is right around the corner and because Gags are not in season until the fall, I thought I would share his advice.

Many thanks to "old salts" everywhere for passing along treasured information to the next generation:

So I take it you like the grouper fishing here in the big bend. Here are a few tips for you.

When looking for red grouper find areas of hard live bottom. By this I mean avoid the relief unless it is gags you are after. Depending on how your bottom machine displays look for the 1st echo (top layer of the bottom) to get thicker.....the thicker that 1st line is the better. Then look for sparse fuzzy stuff (sea fans and sea whips) on top of that thick line and you have good live bottom and good red grouper habitat. Once you find an area like that look around some more because there is likely to be plenty of it. Anchor over these areas even if you do not mark fish. The fish will appear when you drop baits....BIG Baits!!!! Red grouper are SLOBS and will eat half of a 24" ladyfish and keep on eating! When you get the bite going you will likely find gags will show up as well.

It's not common to take red grouper trolling. Think of it this way.....if you see a 6foot ledge out there so has everybody else with a bottom finder but learn how to read live bottom and you will be well on your way to a box full of grouper. Keep a log that describes what each position means and what you catch there during what season that is priceless.

Bait? Take a 2 lb ladyfish or mullet and cut it into

3-4 pieces. Remove the tail fin from the last piece. Now you're fishing for red grouper.

Chunks are the best for the fall and winter. During the summer live bait or sardines are sometimes better. It just depends on whether or not there is a lot of baitfish around.

It's best to have several people fishing since you want to keep bait in the water all of the time. Grouper move around a good bit over those flat bottom areas, so you want to keep them in your area. I try to have one guy fishing smaller baits to see what's down there and keep the action going while everybody else loads up for bear.

Finding the good spots is the only real challenge as long as your tackle is adequate to wrestle the larger larger gags away from cover. If you drop on a spot and catch seabass or small grunts, move to another spot. There won't be many large grouper around. If you start catching large grunts, it often pays to stick with the spot and see if some grouper show up. In general, grouper turn on toward the end of each tide. If the tide is running hard you can still catch a few, but they are holding tight to cover. So you need to almost hit them on the head with the bait. Keep moving around during a strong tide period and you should be able to pick up a few at each drop. Try to be on a known good spot when the current starts to slow down and they will come to you. Have pre-tied rigs or extra rods ready in case of cut offs. DON'T let people stop fishing to rest, tie rigs, or drink a beer when the bite is on. Make a fist and use pieces that size! That will catch you keeper reds