The Acute Angler

May, 2023
Volume 56, Number 5

The monthly newsletter of the Gainesville Offshore Fishing Club

May Hot Shot

Why we fish.

Sometimes it is about how many fish you catch! In preparation for next months Fish Fry at Ken's house a group of your board members made the long trip to 105 feet to bring home enough fish to feed everyone. On another trip Chic caught this impressive Cobia On Tom's boat. Read accounts of both epic trips in this months newsletter...

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From the Editor

Note: President Ryan Kremser is off this month enjoying an epic vacation to "Down Under". We look forward to hearing of his families adventure's and hopefully some great fish stories next month.

Well I had a great fishing month for sure including trips on multiple boats. Enjoyed a second learning trip with Tim on fishing hard bodied jerk baits in skinny water and was rewarded with a 22" Redfish on my third cast! Of course Tim a few minutes later caught a 27" red and then the bite shut down. We fished another 3 hours and then we called it a day.

Your presenter from a couple months ago Perry McDonald invited me to be the boat tender as he free dived and I got in some bottom fishing on a absolutely flat clam day off Cedar Key. The highlight of the trip (or lowpoint) was hitting a estimated 35+ Cobia on the barge and having it bend the stainless steal shaft at the boat. Hugely disappointing to say the least.

The last trip was truly epic and I will save the story for it own article later in the newsletter.

Joining us this month at our monthly meeting on the 23rd is featured speaker, Leiza Fitzgerald. Captain Leiza is a professional saltwater angler, guide, and conservationist. She has been named one of the most influential women in fishing my multiple publications, she won numerous top angler titles while fishing in competitive events including the ESPN Redfish Cup and the FLW Redfish Tour, and she has worked tirelessly to support the conservation of Florida's marine fisheries and the CCA. In 2022 she became the first angler to be inducted into the Florida Sports Hall of fame. Leiza will talking about the Annual CCA star Tournament among other topics.

Still time to renew your GOFC Membership!

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As usual, the meeting will be held in the Auditorium of the Veterinary Academic Building at University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine. There will be free pizza and drinks for purchase before the meeting. There's plenty of free parking right outside the auditorium. Raffle tickets for door prizes and we will have our new window decals available. Meeting starts at 7:30 with fellowship at 7:00.

Thanks again to last months speaker Al Clements who brought for show and tell his actual Kayak and told us many great tips and tricks about the ultimate in skinny water fishing. Including how he “lost” and then found his tricked out fishing machine. Great fishing story with a very happy ending!

Look for a great recipe form Chef CC on a popular species we are seeing in our waters, Mackerel! Yes you can fry it! Cannot wait to try it out myself.

Don’t forget to send in your pictures to the website or contact me to share, we are always looking for great shots of fun times and big fish!

John Ebbs

2023 Newsletter Editor

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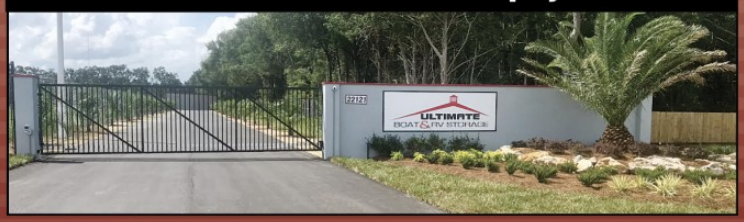

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Captain's Log

By Joe Richard

Noise and Fishing

The relationship between saltwater fish and underwater noise is complicated. Some fish species spook more than others, depending on location and water depth. Others are actually attracted to sound. Knowing the difference can go a long ways toward a successful day of fishing.

For instance, popping corks and topwater plugs deliberately put out noise to attract trout and redfish.

Tripletail are far more shy. We mostly see them when running on plane and by the time you see them, they're spooked and gone. If you're lucky enough to spot them first, you can make a quiet approach. A downwind approach into oncoming waves is a bad idea, because of wave slap on the bow, which spooks these fish. An ideal approach would be from upwind, using an electric motor.

At the opposite end of the noise spectrum: when we first started fishing for cobia, we always heard you should slap the water with a paddle, gun the motor in neutral, and generally put up a ruckus that would attract these curious fish. And it sometimes worked. I'm not so sure about today, where a much smaller population of cobia have learned to avoid hooks and boats. Many of them seem now seem "gun shy."

Farther out in the deep Gulf in blue water, boat noise actually *attracts* pelagic fish. How else to explain the many years of angler success at trolling up marlin, sailfish, mahi, wahoo and tuna? Some boats are better fish attractors than others, because each has its own engine pulse and hull vibration.

Opposite that, shallow water bay fish are the most noise-wary. Burning a shoreline with today's shallow water boats will send fish fleeing into deeper water; they won't put up with that. It can be irksome to watch an airboat prowling the shoreline for hours, into each creek, circling each island, looking for fish, maybe to string a gillnet for mullet and other non-gamefish. We see this mostly in the winter months, during weekdays when few boats are out there. Airboat engines can be so loud, you can scarcely talk in your own boat. Not sure how those above-water airboat engines translate their airport noise underwater to the fish.

On the quietest side are kayakers, and then folks in small skiffs using push-poles in shallow water. It's way more work but rewarding at times, and you can actually hear yourself think. I appreciate these guys enough to stop and chat with kayakers, and maybe give them a tip or two if I know what the fish are biting on. On the Coastal Bend these guys are looking for redfish and big trout. In South Florida and the Bahamas, they're stalking bonefish.

There are all sorts of tricks for sneaking up on noise-wary fish, including wading, walking the jetties, surf and pier fishing, drifting, electric motors, or anchoring and making long casts. Back when we fished kingfish tournaments, almost all of our winning fish were caught while the boat was anchored for hours, sometimes overnight. They had no clue we were there.

I've even fished several boathouses on bays either with or without a howling diesel generator, and certainly did better without the noise. We caught plenty of slot-sized redfish within casting distance, *if* the owner would turn off his generator. (Which he was fond of, to keep the AC running). He didn't catch many fish, but I certainly did when he was gone. It was so quiet out there, I could hear sheepshead splashing underneath the deck, tugging on oysters.

In the bays I still anchor by the stern with a short anchor chain, which is more work than boats with stern-mounted Power Poles. Twin poles will really stabilize a boat, no tilting or bobbing, and every redfish tournament boat carries them. There's no long rattle or tossing anchors with a Captain Hook splash.

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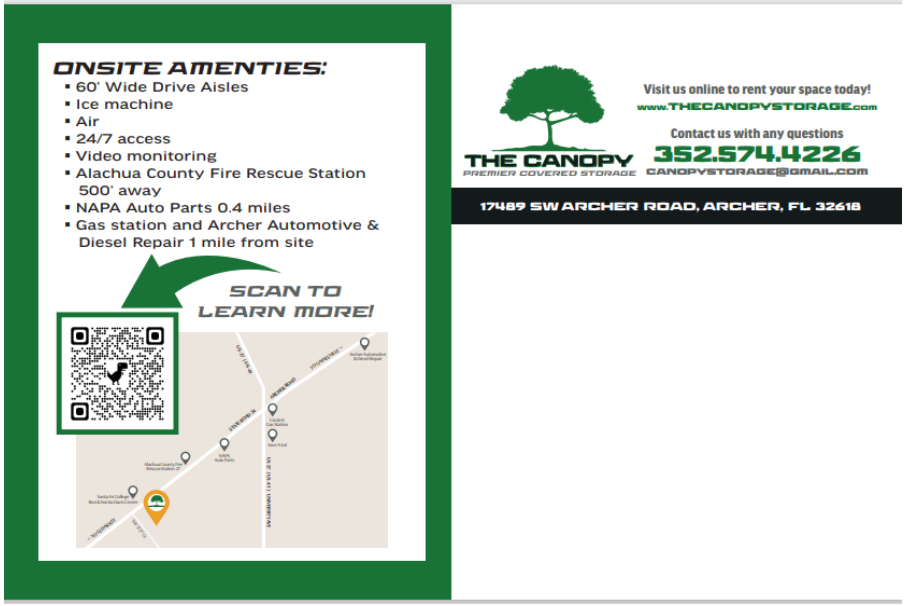
Captains Log (Cont.)

With a stern anchor in the wind, sometimes I get a little water over the transom, and a salty splash on the stern reels. My favorite trick is to park snug against a high-tide shoreline, anchored amidships. Or by the bow and stern with two anchors. That way we can sling baits and spoons way out there. The boat sits quiet as a church mouse, and those fish 30-35 yards away, once again, have no clue. Several times, I've tried anchoring out from shore to shorten our casts, at the same spots, but we never got a bite.

Not sure about electric motors or their pitch of sound, (probably high) but some fish might be wary of it. I know low-frequency sound carries in the water as a distress signal, like a croaker or pig-fish will make. Sharks are certainly attracted to low frequency vibrations, even explosions. Which was bad news for many sailors during WWII).

Some of today's bay boats have expensive sound systems with thumping bass, and I'm not sure how that affects their catches. Surely the fish hear it; that thumping carries a long ways underwater. I don't play loud music while fishing, especially demonic screeching from AC-DC's newer singer that has become popular with today's weekend boats, audible for half a mile. Yes, we all miss Bon Scott, but most of us prefer quiet on the bays while escaping stress back on shore.

A few final tips: think about extra engine noise, when shifting gears. I was snorkeling one day and another boat approached to anchor. Every time they shifted gears, every fish in sight would bolt several feet, before settling down again. The noise was very distinct, a loud "clunk" over the engine noise. To this day, that's why I never shift gears when approaching a honeyhole; instead I cut the motor in forward gear and *coast* in to quietly drop anchor.



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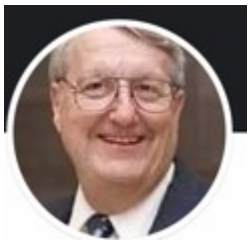
Charlie's Kitchen



Morrison's Cafeteria: Mackerel Almandine

Those of us who have lived in Gainesville for many years remember the Morrison's Cafeteria that was located in the vicinity of the old Gainesville Mall on NW 13th Street. One of my favorite dishes at Morrison's was mackerel almandine. As an oily fish I normally do not consider mackerel a suitable fish for frying, but this recipe is a yummy exception, and it will work with most kinds of fish, not just mackerel. If you have no mackerel fillets handy, try it with seatrout.

If you are using mackerel, it is important that the fish be very fresh. I find that Spanish mackerel become very fishy tasting in less than a week in the refrigerator and less than a month in the freezer. It is therefore best to only use very fresh mackerel for this recipe, preferably no more than a few days old if refrigerated. Prepare the fillets by first splitting them down the center line and remove the thin layer of red meat. Then skin the fillets. By removing the red meat line and skinning the fillet you eliminate the fishy taste that can be problematic with mackerel. I then cut the half fillets crosswise in the middle so that each fillet yields four pieces of a size that is easier to handle.

INGREDIENTS

6 skinless mackerel fillets
3 eggs, beaten
1/2 cup whole milk
Almond extract (if desired)
1 cup mayonnaise
Ritz crackers, crushed
4 oz almond slivers
1 cup all purpose flour
Salt and pepper to taste
Cooking oil

DIRECTIONS

Whisk together eggs, mayonnaise and milk in a bowl, aiming for a final consistency similar to ranch dressing. You can add 1/2 teaspoon of almond extract to the egg wash to enhance the almond flavor if desired.
Season the flour with salt and pepper as desired, mixing in a shallow bowl.
Mix the Ritz cracker crumbs and almond slivers in a second shallow bowl.
Dredge the fillets first in the flour, then in the egg mixture and, after shaking off any excess liquid, dredge in the cracker crumb/almond mixture. Rest the dredged fillets in the refrigerator for 30-45 minutes before cooking.

Add enough cooking oil to a large skillet to cover the bottom with an even layer of oil some 1/4th inch thick. Note that this as a shallow frying technique, not deep frying, so the amount of oil used should not rise to more than 1/4th the way up the sides of the fillets. Preheat the cooking oil to 375 degrees and add the fillets. Cook until the bottom side is well browned (2-3 minutes). Then flip and cook another 2 minutes or so, depending on the thickness off the fillets. Both sides should be evenly browned and the fillets flaky all the way through. Remove the fillets, drain on a paper towel, serve with the tartar sauce of your choice, and enjoy!

For those of you who prefer not to fry your fish, the fillets can be placed in a greased baking dish and baked (not broiled) in the oven at 450 degrees for around 10 minutes, depending on the thickness of the fillets.

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Marine Medicine Pearls

By Mark Rustemier M.D.

PEARL; Plan for sea sickness BEFORE leaving the dock.

Retching is the last sound you want to hear as you head offshore! It usually means that someone onboard is seasick and your plans for the day are about to change. Unfortunately, one of the perils of being out on the water is motion sickness, and most experienced fishermen have been on a boat where someone has involuntarily contributed to the chum line! About a third of the population is vulnerable to sea sickness, but no one is immune when the seas really kick up. So, it is important to understand what can be done to prevent seasickness, as well as treat it on the water, so that everyone on board can enjoy the day.

Seasickness is a form of motion sickness that is brought on by confusion between your senses concerning movement; with your inner ear telling you one thing, and your eyes another. This applies to being in a car, plane or even playing video games. Initially symptoms include; dizziness, nausea, headache, increased sweating, increased yawning progressing to weakness and vomiting (this upper gastrointestinal clean out is thought to be an evolutionary response to possible food poisoning). You may notice that an early warning sign of impending Vienna sausage regurgitation can be that your talkative fishing buddy has become quiet and less active, just before running for the stern.

Once symptoms start there are some behavioral treatments that can be done to improve the situation. It may be helpful to limit head movement, facing forward in the direction the boat is heading. Avoid looking down in the boat (i.e., no book reading or smart phone usage), but instead look out over the water at a point on the horizon. Sometimes lying down, face up with a cold compress over closed eyes is helpful. Stay away from strong odors (i.e., engine fumes, old bait) and separate those "feeling sick" from others already getting sick (nothing promotes vomiting like someone else vomiting). I fished with a guy years ago who on one trip, when someone else on board was starting to get seasick, chose the perfect moment to offer up his can of sardines for lunch; end of story. Sometimes the symptoms may improve on their own as the inner ear adjusts to the movement, and the person gets their "sea legs", such as on a cruise. But other times, a person really just needs to get their feet on dry land to feel better.

There are a variety of over the counter and prescription seasickness treatments, so make sure you are prepared ahead of time, BEFORE heading offshore.

There are medical treatments that can prevent the problem or reduce the symptoms once they have started. Over the counter medicines including (in adult dosages); Dramamine (dimenhydrinate) 50-100mg every 4-6 hours, Bonine (meclizine) 25-50mg once daily and Benadryl (diphenhydramine) 25-50mg every 4-6 hours, are all more effective if taken one hour prior to leaving. Dramamine and Benadryl have children's dosing as well. They can all be effective but may cause some drowsiness and dry mouth. Prescription medication include; Antivert (meclizine 25-100mg per day divided dosing), Transderm Scop (scopolamine in patch form) being worn behind the ear can last up to three days and is best put on 4 hours before leaving. Scopolamine is generally the most effective, but with more side effects, including dilating your pupil if you touch the patch and then rub your eye. Ginger as an over-the-counter supplement, taken orally, 1000mg every 6 hours, or in foods (i.e., ginger snaps) may be helpful. Several types of "wrist bands" are available with electrical or mechanical stimulation of an acupuncture point on the inner aspect of the wrist claiming to help prevent or treat seasickness. There is some evidence that they may help with nausea in pregnancy or chemotherapy, but medical studies have been mixed on treating motion sickness. Whatever medical treatment you decide on using, it may be a good idea to try the medication prior to your trip, to see if the side effects are tolerable.

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Medicine Pearl (cont.)

As with most illnesses prevention is the key. **Plan for sea sickness BEFORE leaving the dock**. Get adequate sleep the night before a fishing trip. Make sure you take in ample fluids, and avoid excess caffeine and alcohol prior to and during the trip as they are diuretics and contribute to dehydration. If you or someone in your group has a tendency to get motion sickness, try to go when the weather forecast is more favorable. Also, keep your first aid kit updated with seasickness medications. A few minutes planning may avoid having someone lying on the deck, praying for the end to come soon.

Transderm Scop patch may be used behind the ear for up to 3 days.

The Rule of Twelves

Since the days of fighting sail in the 18th century, the British Royal Navy used the Rule of Twelves to estimate the height of the tide at any given time. Only 3 data point are needed to use the Rule of Twelves for any given tide (1) the time of low tide, (2) the time of high tide, and (3) the tidal range, i.e. the difference in the height of the high and low tides. You then apply this rule of thumb . . . in the first hour the water depth will change by 1/12th of the tidal range for that tide, followed by 2/12ths in the second hour, 3/12ths in the third hour, 3/12ths in the 4th hour, 2/12ths in the fifth hour and 1/12th in the last hour. Obviously, this is only an approximation that assumes a 6 hour duration for the tide, but it is close enough of most purposes. Here in Florida's Big Bend, a typical 3 foot tide will change by only 3 inches in the first hour, 6 inches in the second hour, 1 foot in the third hour, 1 foot in the fourth hour, 6 inches in the fifth hour and 3 inches in the last hour. The tidal current will more or less follow the same pattern.

"Do not tell fish stories where the people know you. Particularly, don't tell them where they know the fish."
— Mark Twain

"Scholars have long known that fishing eventually turns men into philosophers. Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to buy decent tackle on a philosopher's salary."
— Patrick F. McManus

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Feature Article: Chic and the Cobia

I saw a good Marine forecast for the weekend and got a crew of Tom Bacsik and Mike Dumas on Captain Tom Jaworski's 1st Appearance.

Our first stop was at Doug's Bait Shop for chum and shrimp. While Tom got the bait, I removed the strap and prepared the boat for launch so we would be ramp ready when we got there. While doing so I found a penny on the ground and declared it to be my lucky penny.

We arrived at the ramp at 8:30 AM and the parking lot was full and was prepared for a long walk after parking the truck blocks away. After launching the boat, the lucky penny prevailed when the 3rd angled parking spot had emptied.

On our way to seahorse reef to catch bait, our luck ran out when the 1 ft or less seas forecast were actually 2 ft plus seas, but still doable. We filled our live well with a variety of bait and headed to our destination wreck but decided to make a quick drop on the dry dock, but came up empty there.

We arrived on the wreck and were trying to decide where to anchor when I noticed a school of amberjacks under the boat, and told Tom to lock on the Rhodan. I immediately lowered a pinfish to the bottom and reeled it up 5 feet off the bottom. Before I could put the rod in the rod holder it was game on, after a mild battle I released an undersized AJ.

I put another bait 5 ft off the bottom and got the rod in the holder. About 5 minutes later the rod tip was pointing toward the water. Now it was time for my first battle of getting the rod out of the rod holder. Minutes later I concluded that this was not an AJ and landed an out of season Gag Grouper.

After photographing and measuring it at 28" we released it and continued to fish. We soon realized that we failed to use our descending device, as the Gag was pounding the surface away from the boat.

Lines and anchor up, we motored over and netted the grouper and hooked it up to my homemade descending device and lowered him home.

We anchored back on the spot and soon I was fish on again, this time I landed, measured and sent down a 26" Gag with descension device attached. A quick jerk on bottom did not release it. After several jerks it started moving slowly. I tightened the drag all the way and put my thumb on the spool and it was still moving.

I then concluded a Goliath Grouper had the Gag and descending device and was still taking my line, but soon realized it could not digest the lead and released the homemade device so he could enjoy his grouper dinner.

After catching and releasing several small AJ and grouper Mike Dumas was struggling with a big fish. We could tell from his struggle that he was fighting a huge Reef Donkey.

Finally getting it to the boat I was able to lip Gaf it with a small Gaf but had to get his help to pull it in the boat.

After a few pics and 47 1/2' measurement we released it to the wreck for another angler to catch.

Still fishing we landed and released several more Gags and AJ's when my balloon flouting a live pin fish was acting crazy. I got the rod in my hand when the balloon broke and realized the fish was swimming down toward the bottom and toward the boat. During the fight I knew it was not an AJ or grouper, but when it made a pass by the boat and saw that it was a Cobia and over the minimum size. Captain Tom got the gaff and was able to hook it on the next pass.

The boat rulers only goes to 36" and it was longer than that so we never got a length on it but it weighed in at 21lbs 11oz.

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Chic and the Cobia (cont.)

On our way in I remembered there was a $50.00 bounty on Cobia carcass. Once we got in cell phone range, I googled FWC Cobia Research and found a phone number to call.

Capt. Tom arranged for FWC to meet us at the Post Office in Otter Creek. We were under the impression they would filet the fish and take the carcass. FWC showed up without a knife or intent to filet the fish, so I ended up on the side of the highway in Tom's boat fileting the fish and making a huge mess in his boat but it was a bloody ending to a great day of fishing aboard the 1st Appearance.

GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL PROPOSED DRAMATIC CUTS TO RECREATIONAL GAG GROUPER LIMITS

GAG Grouper Recreational Fishing Rule Changes Will Dramatically Decrease Catch Limits By 85%.... YES 85% in 2024. The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council is currently holding public hearings to get input into the up-coming changes they are getting ready to approve that will decrease recreational annual catch limits by 85% and commercial annual catch limits by 87% (using their numbers and preferred formula changes). This will take effect in 2024, with major interim season decreases this year.

At the public hearing held in Cedar Key at the Nature Coast Biological Station on 5/15/23 which I attended with GOFC member John Byatt along with 30-50 other people of varied interest, a presentation by the Gulf Council was made to help the public understand the current proposals.

It became apparent that the proposals the council is favoring will cause a DRAMATIC decrease in the annual catch limits (which determine limits and seasons) for both recreational and commercial fishermen. My impression is the recent survey SEDAR 72, and the subsequent policy changes that are to be implemented are based as much on changes in the statistical methods used in these calculations rather than a true crash in the gag grouper population that would necessitate an 85% decrease in Annual Catch Limits. But make your own decisions by reviewing the fol-lowing links;

PUBLIC WORKSHOP; has video, general

info; Public Hearings & Scoping Workshops – Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (gulfcouncil.org)

SEDAR 72; most recent survey; ; http://sedarweb.org/documents/sedar-71-gulf-of-mexico-gag-grouper-final-stock-assessment-report_october2021/

(*Editors note: Sorry, the 2nd link will not copy and paste but you can get to it by typing in the information)*

Some of this information is heavy in newly implemented statistical definitions and calculations, really a different lan-guage, however this language is what will be used for other specie surveys impacting more than just the Gag group-er fishery.

Mark Rustemier

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Understanding the John Ellett Contest *With credit to Brian Kiel*

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 separate award following the same guidelines for Special Category

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The monthly newsletter of the Gainesville Offshore Fishing Club

New GOFC Window Decals are here!

Been a while since we have offered these and back by popular demand we had some made up for us with the current logo. These peal off stickers are 4”x6” in size and look great on your boat windshield or vehicle bumper! We are asking for a small donation to cover our costs, 1 for $2 or 3 for $5. Stickers will be available at the general meeting this month!! See Chic or John (me) if you want some.

“Meat for Tribe”

John Ebbs

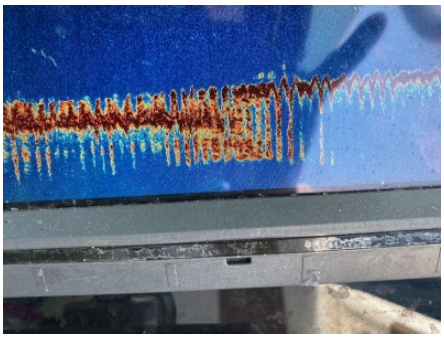
Finishing up after a half day on the water with Tim Pedersen he gets a call from Ken Knopf about a topic the board has been discussing for a couple months now; with the annual fish fry a month away we had wanted to go out on a few club runs and catch enough fish to have for the event. Partly to save the club some cost, partly because heck we always need an excuse to go fishing!

After deciding that Tuesday the 16th was the best day weather wise, Ken asked whom else to invite. The crew was settled on Vigil, Carl, Tim, and me to join Ken on his 28 Everglades center console. Needless to say, I was delighted to be part of the crew and was looking forward to a run to the Bluewater to target Snapper, Red Grouper, Almaco Jacks, and whatever we could entice to come home with us.

We all met at Tim’s boat barn at 5:00am and made the trip over to Cedar Key just as it got light enough to see but still awful early, heck the bathrooms were still locked at the ramp! Loaded with boxes of chum, squid, shrimp, and misc. whatever is in the freezer bait we headed out to seahorse reef to catch pinfish and try our hand at the schools of threadfins roaming about.

One stop to catch pinfish in a chum slick and another on the edge of the reef (we simply followed the Frigates, so awesome to see them out and working) to catch threadfins and we headed offshore for the 2-hour run to 100+ feet. Two catches of note: Tim caught a 4” Barracuda and Carl caught what is a pending GOFC Ballyhoo club record! With the frigates overhead and catching ballyhoo it felt like a day in the keys. One more thing later in the day added to this effect…

Checking two brand new numbers that Ken was sworn to never share by a commercial fishing friend; the first had an ok showing however we moved to the second and were shocked to see a 13-foot relief on the depth finder with at least 2 layers to it! Using the trolling motor to hold us in position, we dropped down live baits, squid, and shrimp to the bottom. What happened next was a major disappointed to the 4 seasoned offshore fishermen and your somewhat less experienced editor; just about every bait was hit hard, them hit even harder by sharks, Goliath Groupers, or both. Tim in one stretch lost 7 straight fish and rigs. The saving grace was shortly after putting out the chum bag, swarms of fish appeared behind the boat, so we had succeeded pulling the fish up in the water column. Ken was the first I believe to score behind the boat with a jig head and caught the one snapper species we did not expect: Yellowtails! We expected Vermilions (Beeliners) of which we did catch a few behind the boat, Mangroves which did not come up as expected but I caught two on the bottom, Red Snapper including a couple approaching 30 inches, and even some Lanes, also on the bottom, but not Yellowtails! And we caught 7 of them to 4 pounds in size!!



Now it felt not like the Big Bend but the Keys for sure.After a couple hours of fast and fun action we decided to move 8 miles to one of Kens favorite spots to try our hand at getting our Amberjacks for the 10 species contest, and see if the Almaco Jacks were going to be mixed in.

Arriving at the spot we were greeted by swarms of AJ’s behind the boat before we really even got on the mark, a very good sign for sure. And the Almaco’s were mixed in and they were big too! AND to make it either more fun, an estimated 60-pound Cobia and a smaller but legal one was in the pack too! As folks scrambled to get baits in the water, your editor pinned on a frisky medium sized pinfish, ran around the boat to the front port side, and was greeted by the big Cobia cruising up the side!

A lucky toss of the pinfish landed on the right side by about a foot and all I saw was the head turn to the right and the unlucky pinfish inhaled and disappear! Fight was on!! For the next 10 minutes I ran completely around a boat at least once, with a couple turns back and forth on the bow, scrambling over and around coolers and gear bags and sabiki rods, over rods in holders in the back, and generally have a blast getting advice and rather loud comments from the peanut gallery. At once point the big fish cruised right by the port side and I yelled “she is coming up!”. Tim pointed out she was way too green, and we were not going to be even thinking about gaffing her yet. I was also informed I would be in for a fight lasting 90 minutes or more. Unfortunately, my visions of glory and being the hunter who brought home “the most meat for tribe” was dashed when she made another sharp, deep run under the bow and I could not get the rod tip up past the trolling motor head and she got off.

Disappointment does not do justice to the feeling, but it was a grand battle while it lasted, and I learned a lot of critical lessons for the next time. Of course, the guys immediately noted it was likely even larger than 60 pounds which helped my emotional state even more!

It was not hard to move on as the AJ’s were swarming and loved the hookless popper that was broken out and it allowed us to see what was the targeting fish before dropping a bait to them. Our goal as noted was Almaco Jacks as those were in season and bigger AJ’s. 3 of us got our AJ’s at this spot and then a bigger one for Tim at a later one and one for Ken. We caught 7 of the Almaco’s and I must say at the time of this writing I had a loin this evening for dinner, and it is great meat; white, mild, and flaky.

We made a couple three other stops to try to finish off our AJ goal, found bigger ones without Almacos at one stop but were much more hesitate to come in the boat. The popper got them in close enough for the technique to work again but Tim started dropping bait down to the wreck and scoring that way as well.

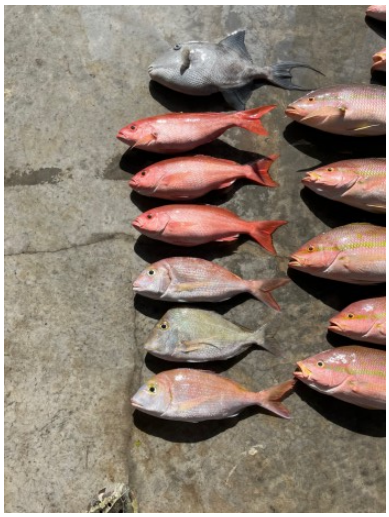
Overall, we caught a total of 5 snapper species, a couple red porgies and even a Triggerfish just barely legal and a Jolthead Porgy. 3 legal Red Grouper including an impressive firetruck over 10 pounds.

After the last stop we made the run for the barn, knowing that we would arrive after dark.

After 14 to 15 hours of road and boat time the decision to drop the boat at Tim’s place and come back in the morning to clean fish and boat was an easy one. We got the bonus the next morning of bringing home just picked cucumbers, zucchini squash, and fresh corn which we all appreciated. Thanks Tim!

We ran 180 miles in total and burned 130 gallons of gas. With 5 of us on board with all that gear, ice, and bait we averaged 1.38 MPG for the twin 300 hp Yammies.

With the Cobia generously donated by Miriam and John from the last tournament we believe we have the fish covered for the fish fry next month, and we all are excited to see Ken and Debbie’s new boat barn. However, I must admit I am already itching for another trip to the bluewater and a second chance at that big Cobia!



The Acute Angler

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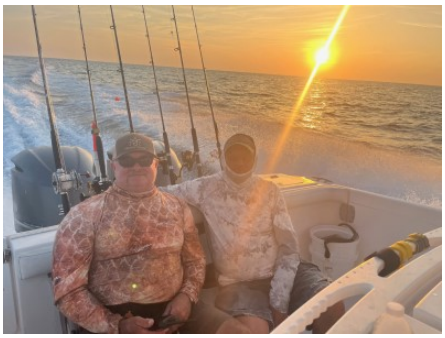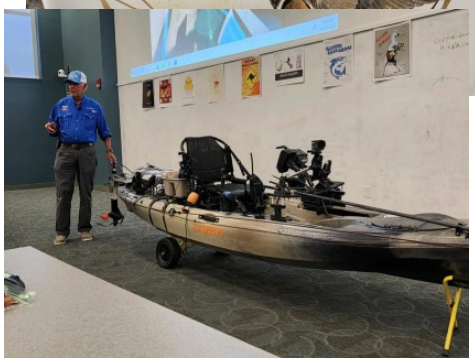
Parting Pics