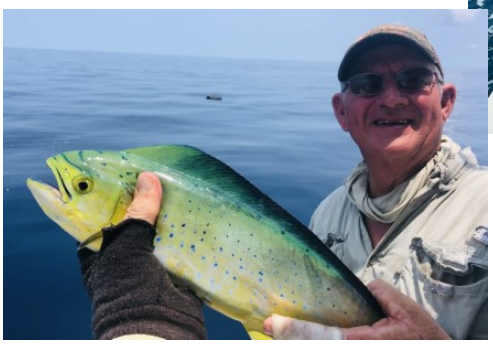
The Acute Angler

August, 2023
Volume 56, Number 8

The monthly newsletter of the Gainesville Offshore Fishing Club

August Hot Shot

Why we fish...Cannot help but to smile when holding the catch...



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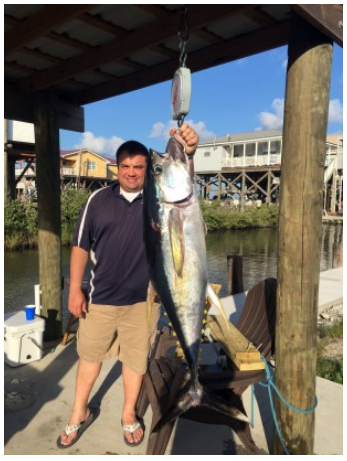

It's still hot out there folks, but at least the wind and rain has been cooperating for the most part.

The massive fronts have finally subsided, and our typical summer weather pattern has set in with scattered afternoon thunderstorms. At least we can fish in the mornings!

Our next meeting will be on August 22nd and we are excited to welcome Scott Richardson from Northwest Seafood in Gainesville as our speaker. Scott will give expert advice demonstrations on caring for and cleaning your catch to maximize its table value.

Our next tournament will be the Annual Fall Tournament on October 21st . Our next social event will also be in October at Ultimate Boat and RV Storage.

After that we'll have the GOFC Auction in November

and the annual redfish and seatrout tournament on December 2nd .

Please remember to set aside any unwanted fishing gear that's still in good condition to donate to the GOFC Auction in November. The auction is an important fundraiser for the club each year that relies entirely on donated fishing gear from GOFC members. It's also a lot of fun to attend, so don't miss it!

Be safe out there and I'll look forward to seeing you all soon!

Your 2023 GOFC President,

Ryan Kremser

From the Editor

Did a lot of fishing this past month but none from a boat, enjoyed a family vacation down in Casey Key which is just south of Sarasota and north of Venice. Fished every day but with the water temps so hot did not have the best of luck but enjoyed it anyway. Caught a 20" red in the back bay but the highlights of the trip were both while snorkeling off the beach; found a mating pair of these crabs and watched as the male held the female from behind and protected her as she shed her hard outer shell and because a softshell right before my eyes. Not sure what type of crab this is, and she would have been great bait for sure, but I could not bring myself to harvesting her after watching the process. The one in the picture was caught one morning after it decided it wanted my shrimp awful badly and held on way too long! A spotted Blue Crab?

Another neat occurrence was while snorkeling in the trough between the beach and the sandbar had a school of about 20 Pompano come up and circle around me about a dozen times before heading back to wherever they were going!

All nice sized and certainly fueled my efforts to catch them all week with jigs, shrimp, Fishbites, Gulp! and everything else the local tackle shops said to use(buy) but to no avail.

Well, there is always next year!

I hope all of you got to enjoy time with family and friends on and in the water this summer.

One note about the fall Tournament: We are excited to see the upgrading and improvements to Suwannee Marina, however with all that going on based on the ramp condition and construction the tournament committee has decided to move the location of the fall tournament to Cedar Key. Start time is daylight and weigh in is between 4-5 at Robinson's Seafood. We will provide more details in the coming weeks. We also will revisit having a tournament at Suwannee next year when conditions are more favorable to host us, and we wish them well on the exciting updates to the facility. You editor would love to see a learnament next year out of that port as it is a neat fishery with both fresh and salt water and bad weather options and is certainly less busy compared to others in our home waters.

John Ebbs

2023 Newsletter Editor

Upcoming Events

August Meeting - Tuesday, 08/22/2023 - 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm

September Meeting - Tuesday, 09/26/2023 - 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm

Fall Tournament - October 21st, Cedar Key. First light start, weigh in at Robinsons Seafood from 4 to 5pm. All 10 species

October Meeting - Tuesday, 10/24/2023 - 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm

October Social Event—BBQ at Ultimate Boat and RV Storage Date: TBD

GOFC Auction and Seafood Boil —November (date: TBD)

Trout-Redfish Tournament out of Steinhatchee:

1st, 2nd and 3rd place prizes for heaviest redfish and 1st, 2nd and 3rd prizes for 3 trout aggregate.

First prize for redfish most spots. May add flounder or remove trout; Date : December 2nd

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Captain's Log

By Joe Richard

Did I See That?

Most Gulf fishermen, if they live long enough, see some odd sights out there over the years. Shrimpers working the Gulf for years see all sorts of odd critters brought up in their nets, along with shark feeding frenzies. Sometimes there are so many sharks, they climb over each other's backs to get at those nets full of food. One shrimper even allowed he was never going back out there at night, after seeing strange lights in the sky.

I can recall some highlights over the years, along with my fishing buddies, and thought I'd share a few.

One day we were offshore 20 miles, after acting on a tip, because someone kept seeing a whale shark at one spot, swimming in clear water. We ran the boat out there, snorkeled around and saw no shark. It seemed the big brute was gone.

After fishing, we headed inshore and after a few miles noticed up ahead a color change of blue to green water. Almost there, I see this shark fin sticking out of the water to port, and another to starboard. Was it two sharks? It took a few moments to realize it was the same fish, I was viewing its dorsal and tail fin, with lots of water in between. I chopped the throttle back to neutral just as we passed between the two fins. Bang! The big outboard's lower unit was knocked out of the water, as we crossed right over the shark's back. In neutral, we all looked astern as a huge whale shark, now fully awake, began thrashing its tail.

It took a few moments for it to pick up speed, before it dove like a submarine making a crash dive. Our nephew visiting from out of state was impressed, but disappointed he couldn't swim with it. We waited around for a few minutes, but never saw it again.

I asked a longtime friend and offshore fishermen what was the strangest thing he ever saw out there. He said one day an acre of "sow" red snapper weighing from 20 to 25 pounds were feeding on the surface, moving along slowly. "Feeding like a school of bass on the lake," he said. He couldn't see what they were feeding on; there were no jumping baitfish.
Every jig and spoon they slung at the school resulted in a hookup. It was hard work fighting those fish with 20-pound line and a reminder to always carry casting rods when offshore. He said it was 20 years ago and most probably in September. If so, we can surmise it was a school of big fish ready to begin courtship, gathered up for their annual spawning ritual that happens every September.

On another trip, he and another mutual friend spent the night offshore. Right at sunset they were catching kingfish, and cranked a typical schoolie king alongside the boat. To their shock, a massive kingfish of six feet, at least 75 pounds, came from nowhere and chomped down on the small king, chewing on it right in front of them. They said there was no chance it was a barracuda.

Still 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 pay using PayPal.

Captain's Log (cont.)

On another trip, drifting in 60 feet of water, they saw a 30-pound kingfish skyrocket and land on a small production platform, slamming around on the catwalk before flopping back in the water. You know the kings are biting, when they're jumping 10 feet up on the platforms.

More jumping kings: One day the Port Aransas partyboat La Pesca was anchored offshore and they noticed a disturbance far away on the glassy Gulf. It looked like a school of baitfish approaching. The commotion drew closer, heading right for them, and the captain realized it was a massive school of kingfish jumping and feeding on something. As the school drew near, the captain ordered everyone inside, which must have been difficult, with so much action about to happen. From the cabin they watched as kingfish flew past the windows and heard others thumping against the hull. When the storm of kingfish had passed, all ventured outside and found seven or eight kings still flopping on deck. These were schoolie kings of about 15 pounds, nothing big. But potentially dangerous when airborne.

Getting hit by a jumping kingfish is a serious WTH moment, and I consider myself lucky to have survived that very thing. I was treading water next to the boat at a weedline, taking underwater photos of hooked mahi. I had my mask off, talking to the guys up in the boat. Someone skated a jig across the surface, ready to make another cast. A kingfish jumped at the jig but missed, flying a good 15 feet through the air, hitting the back of my neck and the side of the boat. I was stunned by the impact and blinded by the splash, but somehow my neck only had a red spot without a scratch. Its mouth must have been closed when it hit.

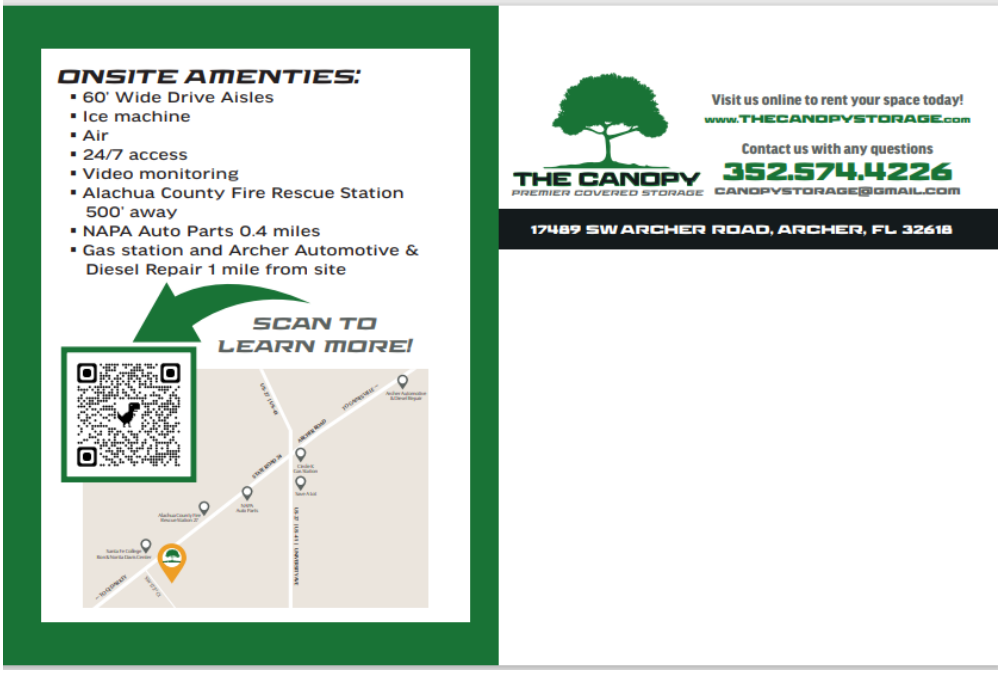
In June 1983, we'd launched our 14-foot jonboat at a fish pass just south of Port Aransas. The pass was already sanding in, and we had a difficult time launching; we literally had to carry that boat to the water. Cranked up the 15-horse outboard and idled around the north jetty and stopped about 70 yards off the beach. It was a flat, glassy day with lime green water. Over on the beach, guys were shoulder deep, throwing plugs for trout. Nearby, perhaps 20 yards away, a trout floated belly up; somebody had released it. A lazy fin circled the trout, a fin about four feet tall—so tall that it drooped. At first we assumed it was a manta ray's wingtip, but then there was a swirl and the trout disappeared. Alarmed, we realized the big shadow was headed our way. Passing slowly beneath us, the hammerhead shark was longer than my boat, and we sat very still until it was gone. His hammer appeared to be five feet across. It isn't every day a great hammerhead passes by mere feet away, with only beer can aluminum between you, and him.

One day we'd climbed aboard a tiny gas platform off Johnson Bayou, Louisiana. It was a hot August day in 1976, the movie Jaws was in all the theatres, and of course we'd already seen the flick. We had our choice of many shallow water platforms to fish, and could catch several trout at each one, doodle-socking gold spoons near bottom about 20 feet down. While standing in the shade. We caught a few trout and then looked up from our work. There, about 50 yards away, this orange buoy was cruising by, half-submerged, heading east. It had to be a commercial longline buoy from further offshore, broke off by something huge. Was it a bluefin tuna or a big mako? We scrambled after it, abandoned our tackle and trout on the rig, jumped down into my 15-foot Thunderbird and chased after it. Caught up, eased closer and dragged that 36-inch buoy into the boat. We got you now! Tied the one-inch yellow poly rope to my boat's centerline bow cleat. Hmm. Whatever was down towed my boat along without slowing at all...I put the 70-horse Johnson in full reverse for minutes on end until

Captain's Log (cont.)

the boat was shaking, but our forward progress never changed in the slightest, just kept cruising along at the same three knots.
We tried everything but nothing worked, it was always three knots and straight ahead. I goosed the boat ahead and we collected 100 feet of nice rope, coiling it in the bow, contemplating whether to cut it and take what we could. I put the boat in neutral and told my buddy to hang on, earning him a few rope burns before all that rope was back in the water... Once again, it was straight ahead at three knots.

I finally glanced up, squinted, and there on the horizon, a half-mile ahead was a 150-foot oil company workboat with a small crowd gathered on the stern. They were watching these two idiots in a little boat, wrestling with their seismic tow buoy...



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Charlie's Kitchen
By Charlie Courtney

The Art of Frying

Seafood and frying go together like ice cream and cake (or perhaps I should say shrimp and grits). To fry any battered or breaded seafood, you can heat your cooking oil in a variety of cooking pots — an electric skillet or deep fryer, a cast iron dutch oven, a heavy cast-iron skillet, or a huge outdoor frying pot. However, there is a lot more to frying than simply heating up some oil in a pot or electric fryer and dropping in the battered seafood.

Far and away the single most important consideration is proper temperature regulation — maintaining a temperature as close to 375 degrees as possible throughout the entire frying session is paramount. Failure to maintain this temperature after the seafood is dropped into the fryer will result a soggy, greasy crust rather than a crispy crust. The secret to avoiding a big temperature drop involves three things: (1) adequate thermal mass, (2) adequate heat, and (3) not overloading the fryer.

Thermal mass can be achieved in several ways. A heavy cast iron skillet or dutch oven, although slow to heat up, will store a lot of heat in the thick metal walls, thus acting as a buffer against temperature drop. In contrast a thin, cheap aluminum pot stores little heat. But, you ask, what about those large, relatively thin frying pots designed to be used on an outdoor gas burner? These hold a great quantity (as in gallons) of cooking oil, the sheer volume of which provides the necessary thermal mass.

Adequate heat means having a sufficiently powerful heat source to quickly restore the cooking oil's temperature to 375 degrees after the initial temperature drop and then maintain that temperature. For this purpose, nothing can beat a powerful outdoor standalone gas burner as these delivers anywhere from12,000 to 30,000 btu of heat. Indoors, a gas range or powerful electric induction range will do the job, but a coil or radiant (i.e., glass top) electric range is more limited in its heat output. With an electric skillet or fish fryer, you will need some experience with the device to gain a feel for how well it is able to maintain temperature and adjust the load of seafood accordingly.

Not overloading the fryer means just that. Don't try to fry too much food at once. It is best to fry multiple, small batches, taking care to allow the oil to return to 375 degrees between batches. Be particularly careful to limit batch size when frying frozen foods as these can cause the cooking oil's temperature to drop precipitously. Finally, don't guess — use an accurate deep fry thermometer to monitor the temperature of the oil. I find that an infra-red thermometer also works well for monitoring temperature unless the pot is made of shiny stainless steel or aluminum that reflects the infra-red beam.

One more thing — do not cover the skillet or fryer unless you like a soggy, greasy crust. The cover holds steam, and thus moisture, in the fryer, whereas the object of frying is to drive moisture out of the food's crust. Leave the lid off!

Your choice of cooking oil is also important. You should choose an oil having a high smoke point, greater than 400 degrees, because your seafood may acquire a burnt flavor if the cooking oil begins to smoke while frying. Here in the deep south peanut oil is most used, but canola, vegetable, corn, sunflower, grape seed, safflower, and refined avocado oils are suitable as well.

Reusing the oil in which seafood has been fried can be problematic, as the oil may pick up the flavor of the seafood and transfer it to whatever is fried in it next. Many people will either discard the oil or save it for reuse only with seafood. However, I have found that frying potatoes in the oil immediately after the seafood removes the seafood flavor, which, somehow, does not seem to affect the flavor of the fried potatoes.

Charlie's Kitchen (cont.)

Three somewhat different types of coatings are used when frying seafood — batter, breading, or dredge. With batters, all of the ingredients are first mixed together to make a thick, sticky semi-liquid. Adding a carbonated beverage such as beer or club soda will result in a lighter crust due to carbon dioxide bubbles forming in the batter. The seafood is submerged in the batter until it is thoroughly coated and then deep fried (batters work best for deep frying).

With breading, the wet and dry ingredients are applied separately in a 3-step process, typically dredged in flour, dipped in beaten eggs, and finally coated with a coarse breading of panko, breadcrumbs, corn meal, or cracker crumbs. Breading is suitable for either deep frying or pan frying (shallow frying).

With dredging, the seafood is dipped once in a simple coating, usually seasoned flour and is best used when pan frying. The result is a thin crust that allows more of the flavor of the seafood to come through. The surface of the seafood left slightly moist for dredging to help the dry coating stick, but it is best left somewhat dry before battering or breading to prevent the coating from slipping off.

With deep frying the breaded or battered seafood is submerged in a large pot of oil and cooked until golden in color. Resist the temptation to move the seafood around during deep frying.

Pan frying uses only enough oil to submerge the bottom third of the seafood, which, however, will have to be flipped once to cook the other side before it is done. Pan frying uses much less oil than deep frying, and the seafood seems to absorb less oil while being cooked. Because so little oil is used, pan frying is best done in a large, heavy cast iron skillet to provide adequate thermal mass as a buffer against temperature drop.

Most people drain their fried foods on paper towels. However, steam cannot escape from the space between the paper towel and the hot food, thus leaving the crust soggy. Instead, place your freshly fried delights onto a wire cooling rack as they come out of the fryer. The oil can then drip away while any steam can escape. when cooking several batches, place the wire rack on a baking sheet in a 300-degree oven. This will keep the food warm while you finish the remaining batches without drying out the first batches.

While you can make fried seafood in an air fryer, that device really comes in handy for reheating previously cooked seafood (as well as any accompanying French fries and hushpuppies). Just place your leftover seafood in a single layer in the air fryer basket. Set the air fryer to "reheat" with a temperature of 350°. Reheat for 6-7 minutes, flipping after 4 minutes, and the crispiness is restored.

I have not given any recipes for fried seafood in this month's column as fried seafood recipes can be found in abundance almost anywhere. Next month I will talk about cooking seafood in the air fryer and provide a few recipes.

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Marine Medicine Pearls

By Mark Rustemier M.D.

PEARL; **Understanding Ciguatera Fish**

Ciguatera sounds like Viagra or Levitra but is a lot less fun. Most salt water fishermen have heard of ciguatera fish poisoning (CFP) from eating fish, but since it is uncommon in the United States, not many really understand what this illness is all about. You see, eating the wrong fish, even though it was fresh, kept cool and prepared appropriately, can still cause significant gastrointestinal, cardiac and neurological problems from CFP. Ciguatera is not an infection like a bacterial pneumonia, but it is a toxin that acts like a chemical poison in the person who ingests it. There is nothing to alert the fisherman, chef or unfortunate victim to the presence of ciguatera since it does not cause the fish to have a bad odor, color or taste. Just as importantly, it is NOT destroyed by cooking or freezing.

Ciguatera poisoning starts out on the reef, at the bottom of the food chain, with the dinoflagellate (algae), Gambierdiscus toxicus. This toxic microscopic sea plant is eaten by grazing (herbivorous) reef fish, which are in turn preyed upon by the meat eating (carnivorous) predatory fish, which of course are what most recreational fishermen target. The toxin is concentrated in the meat of the predatory fish over time, with the largest fish accumulating the highest level of toxin. The most common fish of concern are the barracuda, amberjack, grouper, snapper, shark, mackerel, triggerfish and hogfish. Remember the toxic dinoflagellates are the problem and need to be present in the local reef ecosystem to cause an issue with any of these species. The algae can bloom sporadically on affected tropical or subtropical reefs, while in some regions of the world the toxic dinoflagellates are always present, which means certain fish species need to be continually monitored and avoided. When traveling, best to ask local fishermen what they avoid eating.

Ciguatera is the most common marine toxin disease world wide, endemic in the Caribbean Sea, Pacific and Indian oceans, but fortunately it has a low incidence in the coastal United States. However, ciguatera poisoning is felt to be under reported, since it often resolves within days to weeks, while being misdiagnosed as some “GI Bug”. Specific geographic areas of concern for Americans include; south Florida (Atlantic and Gulf sides), the Bahamas, Hawaii, Guam, the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and the south Pacific. Ciguatera “outbreaks” are tracked by various governmental agencies with the U. S. Food and Drug Administration monitoring fish food products, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention investigating human cases, as well as state health departments providing local information and monitoring.

Barracuda are great “predatory” sport fish but with the risk of ciguatera poisoning the CDC recommends they should be catch and release only.

Pearls (cont.)

One CDC case report in 1982, involved an Italian freighter off Freeport Bahamas, where 14 crewmen were treated in Florida hospitals for ciguatera after they ate a 25lb barracuda caught by one of the crew. In 1991 the CDC reported 20 cases of ciguatera poisoning that were caused by eating amberjack traced back to a seafood dealer in Key West. In 2014, 6 cases in Orange County FL were related to eating Black grouper bought commercially.

So, with commercial distribution of fish, not just fishermen and coastal populations are at risk! The Florida Department of Health operates a Poison Information Center that can be contacted at 800-222-1222 with any concerns about possible poisoning. They can provide information and give treatment advice on ciguatera, together with red tide, shellfish related illness and other marine toxins.

So, if while in the Bahamas you decide to sample the local ciguatera barracuda dish, what can you expect?

Well you may be running for the head within a few minutes or it may take hours to kick in. However, the gastrointestinal, cardiac, and neurologic symptoms usually occur within 6 hours. Gastrointestinal symptoms include; nausea, vomiting and diarrhea, while cardiac problems can manifest as an irregular heart beat and low blood pressure. The neurologic complications of ciguatera encompass “pins and needles” numbness, headache, muscle pain, itching, weakness and the often diagnostic REVERSAL of temperature sensation (i.e. the cold beer feels hot, and the hot coffee feels cold!).

But how do you know when you really have it?

Unfortunately, there is no blood test or other diagnostic test for ciguatera in humans. It is a “clinical” diagnosis, based on the history of having eaten a reef fish, and displaying the correct symptoms. If symptoms occur after eating that barracuda sandwich it is advisable to freeze the left overs (i. e. the doggy bag) so that they can be tested by investigating authorities.

There are expensive reference labs that allow authorities to test the FISH for the ciguatera toxin, however commercially available retail tests for fish have not been as reliable. The first field test kit, Cigua-Check was found on a study in 2011 to not be reliable and does not appear available anymore. A newer test released in 2016 by SeaTox Research is a RBA (fluorescent receptor binding assay) priced at $515 for a multi test kit. However, I could not find a follow up independent study confirming its efficacy.

Now if you have eaten the wrong fish, have been running to the bathroom a lot and your cold Gatorade tastes hot, what can be done?

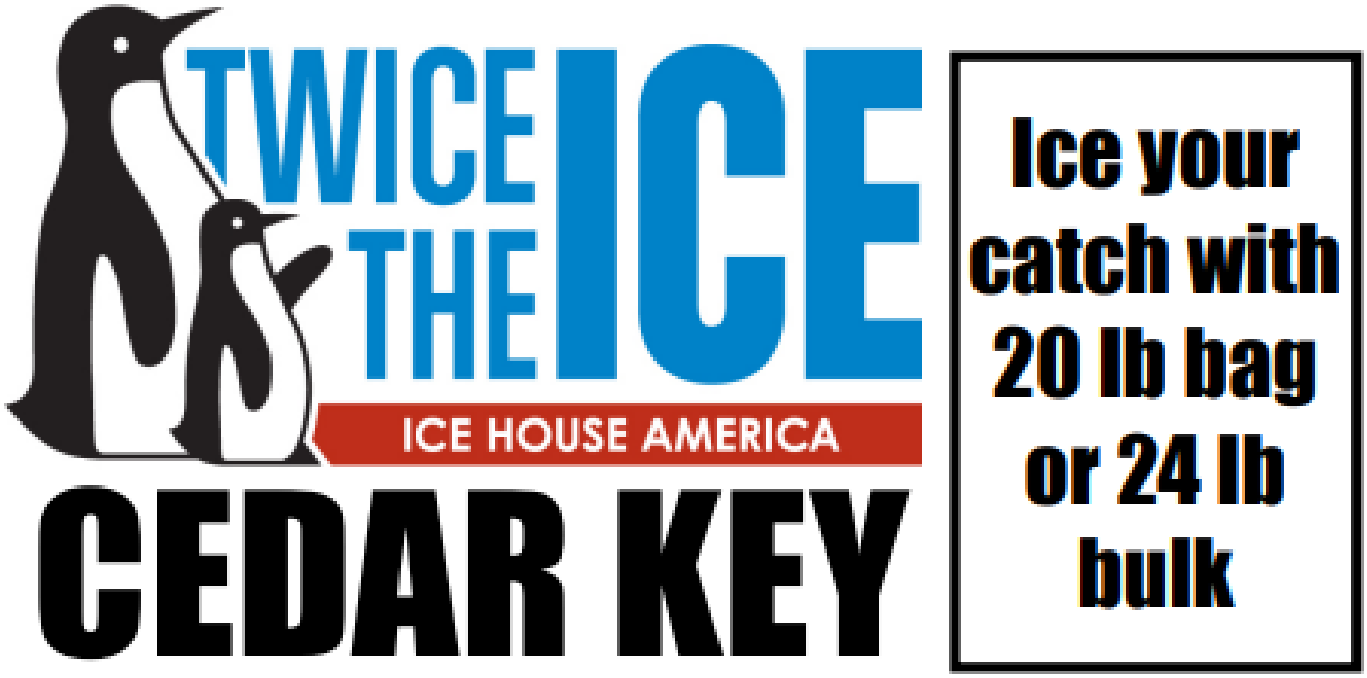
Hogfish, are “grazing” reef fish that are great eating and usually harvested by spear more that hook and line, but can cause ciguatera poisoning in certain regions.

Pearls (cont.)

Fortunately, ciguatera poisoning is rarely lethal and usually resolves within 1-4 weeks with just supportive treatment. This means managing the individual symptoms; using oral or intravenous fluids for dehydration, antiemetic medications to help vomiting and antihistamines for itching. For more severe neurologic symptoms, intravenous mannitol has been used within a few days of onset, with variable success. However some of the neurologic symptoms can last for months and rarely years. Those that have recovered from ciguatera may also experience episodic recurrence of symptoms for months or longer when eating any fish (not just fish with ciguatera), shellfish, nuts, caffeine or alcohol.

As with most medical problems prevention is always the goal. When in a potentially affected region, it is a good idea to get local information on the species of concern. Also, when in higher risk areas, it is reasonable to limit eating reef fish to the smaller sizes (i.e. up to 7lbs).

The CDC recommends across the board, not eating barracuda, especially from the Caribbean. Furthermore, remember that COOKING OR FREEZING THE FISH DOES NOT KILL THE CIGUATERA TOXIN, so you can still get ED (emesis and diarrhea!) from those nicely vacuum-packed fillets. Reliable inexpensive test kits for the FISH unfortunately are available to date. Finally, like with any food found buried in the back of the refrigerator, “when in doubt throw it out”, and no it is not advised to test a suspicious fillet on your less than favorite neighbor or in-law…



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.

Ellett Contest standings as of Mid August:

Mens Division

1	Hinton, Chic	136.03
2	Reed, Dale	135.21
3	Ellett, Ed	135.03
4	Dumas, Mike	121.8
5	Vining, Carl	113.32
6	Jaworski, Tom	100.3
7	Horn, Phil	83.18
8	Richard, Joe	76.2
9	Byatt, John	70.93
10	Ebbs, John	58.72

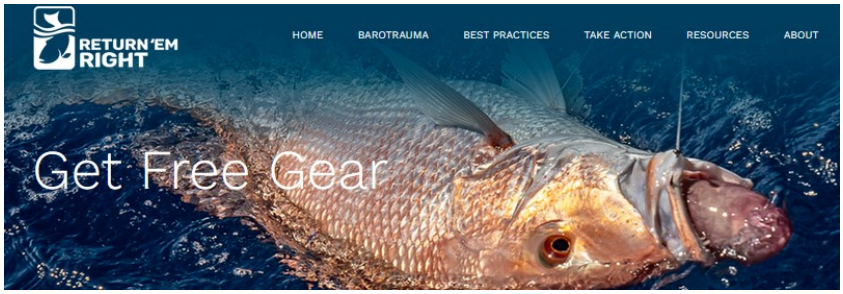
Ladies Division

1	Cross, Dawn	82.67
2	Vining, Staci	72.79
3	Czerwien, Susan	30.58
4	Richard, Amy	25
5	Tavarez, Miriam	25
6	Cutwright,Melvina	25

Look at the point difference between 1 and 5 in the men's division!

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.

Recent message from the FWC:

Dear Florida Reef Angler,
Thank you for your participation in Florida's recreational fishing data collection program by signing up for the State Reef Fish Survey. With the summer fishing season in full swing, we wanted to remind you about a recent rule change that took effect on April 1, 2023. **This rule change requires anglers to have a venting tool or descending device rigged and ready for use when targeting reef fish from a vessel, including catch and release, in state waters.** State waters extend from shore to 3 nautical miles on the Atlantic coast and from shore to 9 nautical miles on the Gulf coast. In state waters, reef fish species include groupers, snappers, amberjacks, gray triggerfish, red porgy, sea bass, hogfish and tilefish.
The goal of this rule is to help increase the survivability of reef fish species that commonly experience, **barotrauma;** a pressure related injury. The signs of these injuries include the stomach protruding out of the mouth, bulging eyes, bloated belly, distended intestines and inability to swim down independently.
If you will be targeting these species from a vessel, please remember to have either a descending device or venting tool rigged and ready to go. As a friendly reminder, **these tools are also required in adjacent federal waters when fishing for reef fish**. In the Gulf, a descending device or venting tool must be rigged and ready to use on board a vessel. In the Atlantic, a descending device must be on board and readily available.
We hope that you find this information useful as you prepare for your time on the water.
For more information about this rule change and other required reef fish gear you can visit MyFWC.com/ReefFishGear. Please feel free to reach out to us at Marine@MyFWC.com if you have any questions.

Tight Lines,

Outreach and Education, Division of Marine Fisheries Management

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Let's Go Fishing!

MLS REALTOR

Some recipes in case you are in the mood for fried stuff...

John Ebbs, Newsletter Editor

Could not help but break out a couple favorites after reading Charlies article on fish frying. Pardon the fun on the name of one of the recipes…

Cajun Beer Batter Fish Nuggets

this recipe sounds spicier than it actually tastes
(great for grouper or other firm fish like redfish)
2 pounds of fish fillets
3 eggs, slightly beaten
1/2 cup milk
1/2 cup beer
3 tablespoons prepared mustard
1 teaspoon Tabasco sauce
2 teaspoons salt, divided
2 teaspoons black pepper, divided
1/2 to 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper, divided, or to taste
3 cups fine yellow corn flour*
vegetable oil or shortening for deep frying

In a mixing bowl, whisk together eggs, milk, beer, mustard, Tabasco, and half of the salt and peppers. Cut fish fillets into bite sized pieces, or nuggets. Place fish in egg mixture, coating well; cover, refrigerate, and let soak for about 1 hour. Mix corn flour with the remaining salt and peppers in a shallow, wide bowl or pie plate.
Preheat oil in deep fryer to about 370ºF.

Remove fish from mixture and dredge with corn flour mixture. Fry fish until the fish nuggets float to the surface and turn golden brown, taking care not to overcook.

Place fish nuggets on paper towels or wire rack to drain, patting gently with paper towels to blot up excess oil.

*If you can't find corn flour, process cornmeal in the blender or food processor to make it finer.
(i like to double the mustard and tabasco and it's still not very spicy but taste great)

Blue Balls Recipe:

Ok first the story: Growing up close to the Chesapeake Bay our family caught lots of bluefish, and while great fighters, Blues are an oily fish and not as tasty as others. We found a way to use the meat as a meat substitute for crab cakes, or in this case, blue balls. The name just seemed to fit.

Use about 2 pounds, filleted bluefish, or any other fish you want to try (I have tried this with a number of different fish such as Amberjack and King Mackerel and found it works great. I am sure Lobster would be interesting to try). Cut out the dark meat along the centerline, taking care to get as much off as you can. Bring to a very low boil a pan of water with 2 teaspoons of Old Bay seasoning. Parboil the filets until they flake easily with a fork. Remove from pan and drain on paper towels. Take about a tablespoon of Old Bay and mix with the cooked fish. Add the seasoning, a little at a time while mixing up the fish. Do not mix hard, just "fold" it in and together.

Take about 3 to 4 slides of bread, trim the crust off and discard. Cut up the bread into cubes about 1/4 of an inch. If the bread is slightly frozen this is an easy step. Mix the now favored fish with the bread cubes and add 2 tablespoons of mayo, 2 teaspoons of parsley, 1 teaspoon of Worcestershire sauce, 1 egg, salt and pepper to your taste. The mixture should hold together nicely in your hand when you make a ball. Too soupy add some more bread cubes, too dry add some more mayo. Mold the mix into balls about the size of golf balls and set on wax paper. You can put them in the fridge overnight to blend the favors together. You can also freeze them for later.

You can follow along with Charlies advice earlier in the newsletter and cook several ways: Deep-fry, broil, or fry in oil in a pan. (If you broil, I found that flatten then a bit to look like a hockey puck is best to get a nice broil browning. Flip once to broil brown on both sides).

Remember that everything is cooked so you just need to get them to a golden brown for taste. Our favorite was to deep-fry until they float to the top (about a couple minutes), remove and drain on paper towels or a wire rack, and serve with tartar sauce and lemons.

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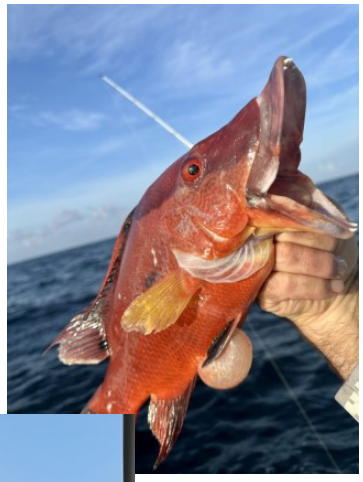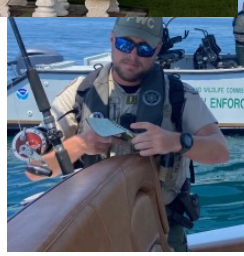
Parting Pics