

Take the Bait
April 2006
Capt. Dan Brooks
Where's The Bait?

Everything seems to be running a little late this spring and it all seems dependant on the spring migration of baitfishes that normally invade the bay and gulf coast. Some scattered reports have been coming in for a few weeks that still have the bait schools well off shore. Inshore we have had to rely on live shrimp as the main staple bait for most anglers. Boatloads of snook have been staged around the docks within a mile of the beaches and they are all waiting for the same thing we are, "the bait". In the past few weeks I've had several clients bouncing free lined select shrimp right over their noses but their mouths are staying shut. That's typical for snook though, they quite often only have certain times of the day that they choose to feed.

Redfish have not been so picky and have been feeding well on the shrimp offerings near the creek and river mouths in the bay area. With the water being as clear as it is the fish are pretty spooky in the skinny water but drifting the shallow flats and making long casts with a one ounce gold spoon may increase your chances. Most of the reds have been on the short side but still fun to catch. The big guys seem to be scattered about here and there but the rat reds are beating them to the baits. Sheepsheads are still filling coolers for anglers on the bay area bridges and rock piles. It has been an outstanding year for the convict fish and a first for me as one of my younger anglers caught a tagged sheepshead, gave all the stats to the Florida Wildlife Commission (FWC) and received a free T-shirt for his accomplishment.

The FWC created the angler recognition programs in 1995 that show the diversity of species available throughout the state and to encourage anglers to fish the four regions of Florida by issuing certificates for its Florida Grand Slam Challenge. A grand slam consists of catching three specific species of fish on the same day. The species for each region is as follows:

- North Florida Grand Slam: Redfish, Spotted Sea Trout and Cobia
- South Florida Grand Slam: Bonefish, Tarpon and Permit
- Florida East Coast Grand Slam: Redfish, Spotted Sea Trout and Tarpon
- Florida West Coast Grand Slam: Redfish, Snook and Tarpon.

Encouraging anglers to try different types of fishing is what the Grand Slam Program is all about. While the species included in each Grand Slam are representative of the different regions of Florida, you can catch the fish anywhere in the state and still qualify for your Grand Slam Certificate. So if you would like to try catching a slam, or maybe all four slams in one year, contact the State Record Program by writing the FWC, Division of Marine Fisheries, 620 S. Meridian St., Tallahassee, Fl. 32399-1600, or call 850-488-6058. Entries are free.