Photo – Paul Braeger deep baited for this 20-pound Gag grouper while fishing offshore at Amelia Island’s popular FA live bottom.

Photo – Black sea bass are numerous offshore and are excellent eating too. Keith Williams is pictured with a nice sea bass.

Photo – Kay Granitz reeled in this nice Amelia Island redfish recently while fishing a high in-coming tide with Captain Terry D Lacoss.”

“High & Low Water Game Fish”

By Terry Lacoss

Local fishermen are often frustrated while trying to figure out the perfect tide while targeting a variety of Amelia Island both fresh and saltwater game fish. In some cases fishermen may enjoy their best luck while fishing the last few hours of the out-going tide and during their next fishing trip to the very same spot, experience very slow fishing conditions. The old saying, “You have to go fishing in order to catch a fish” is so true. Given a variety of fishing conditions, fishermen can only hope that they are launching their fishing boat at the right tide and under perfect fishing conditions.

To be a successful fisherman, especially where heavy fishing pressure is an everyday occurrence, fishermen will need to have a good understanding of game fish feeding habits, habitat and more importantly, tides.

The many tidal phases including mid in-coming, mid out-going, low tide and flood tides are extremely critical to your fishing success. In fact in many different fishing situations, scheduling your fishing trip depending on the predicted tides, in many cases is extremely critical to your fishing success.

For example an early morning good in-coming tide flooding nearby shoreline habitat, including boat dock pilings, rock jetties and oyster bars, redfish, sea trout and flounder will move into and often right over the flooding habitat and begin to feed. Offshore, inlet and beach game fish will also feed more actively during a high flooding tide as clean water begins to cover their favorite habitat.

When I first began saltwater fishing, sometime in May of 1960, I did not have a clue to how the tides worked and how they affected saltwater game fish. As the years progressed, fellow fishermen suggested to me to fish a particularly fishing hole, at a particular tide and you will catch more fish. Soon, I began to schedule my fishing days and even hours around the tides. And for the first time in my saltwater fishing career, I began to unlock one of fishing’s best, kept secret!

More importantly being able to fish on a day to day basis, I soon learned that game fish would feed during a small window of opportunity and during a particular tide phase. For example, if the tide was high close to the beaches or at inlet mouths during mid-morning, a major game fish bite would take place during the last hour of the flood tide and during the first hour of the out-going tide.

However as the flood tide came later each day, the game fish bite would gradually decrease. Keeping in mind that area tides will be some 30 to forty-five minutes later each day, depending where you are fishing. For example if the tide is high on Monday at 9:00 AM, it will be high on Tuesday at around 9:45 PM, if there is a 45-minute differential. Obviously, if I hoped to put my fishing partners on big kingfish, I would concentrate on fishing the inlets and beaches during the early morning flood tides. After the bite ended I would navigate to a nearby fishing structure. There was simply no use in fishing the same waters, because both the baitfish and the game fish would disappear as well.

However on rare occasions, I have found that game fish will feed all day on a particular structure, no matter what the tidal phase may be. These are the days that you will have the opportunity to fill your photo album with photos of trophy game fish!

I can remember one particularly instance when fishing the tide was very crucial to our fishing success. This happened some 20 fishing seasons ago, during the summer of 1982.

Back then in my early years of saltwater fishing, I mainly concentrated on catching big tarpon, cobia, redfish and the occasional kingfish, while fishing the tip of the St. Mary’s south jetties. In those early days of saltwater fishing, there were so many game fish that fishing the tides were not so critical. However I had also learned that fishing was also better at certain tide phases.

The story begins when Billy Burbank asked me to fish with him during the 3rd Annual Golden Isles Kingfish Rodeo. I obliged and we soon showed up for the Captains meeting. Little did we know that the tournament committee had put all Florida waters off limits! Now we were forced to fish in Georgia waters and find a new fishing hole without any time on the water.

I soon called Captain Les Sutton, who had been catching some nice kings while fishing at the tip of the St. Mary’s north jetty rocks. This fishing hole was in Georgia waters, as the boundary line ran right down the center of the St. Mary’s inlet. Les was also an extremely liked charter captain who enjoyed chumming for both kingfish and tarpon at the St. Mary’s inlet and has since passed away.

“Where are you catching all of those huge kingfish,” I asked Captain Les Sutton. “I saw you come in with a bunch of big kings yesterday and Billy Burbank and I could sure use a good tip. We are fishing in the Golden Isles Kingfish Tournament tomorrow and have to fish in Georgia waters.”

“We have been fishing just off from the tip of the St. Mary’s jetties,” Captain Sutton answered on the telephone. “But the tide is critical, you won’t catch a kingfish until an hour before the flood tide.”

The next morning Billy Burbank and I navigated the Georgia’s shallow coastline until we reached the tip of the St. Mary’s north jetties and eventually won the tournament.

Tide and moon phase charts are normally posted in your local newspaper and are often available at area bait and tackle stores. Or you can visit [www.noaa.com](http://www.noaa.com) and print out the year 2017-tide chart, including moon phases.

The Nassau Sport Fishing Association will showcase member John Burns September 27th at “Ten Acres” beginning at 6:15 pm. Burns will give a lecture on saltwater fishing our local jetties. For more information please visit www.nsfafish.net.