Author: Terry D. Lacoss

Coastal Angler

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 “Fernandina Beach Fishing Report”

 The month of May starts off with a bang as kingfish, cobia, Spanish mackerel and a variety of striking game fish migrate into our offshore, inlet and beach waters. The gag grouper season opens on May 1st, which offers excellent bottom fishing action and seafood fare too!

 Cobia weighing to 80-pounds will hold close to working shrimp boats, channel buoys and close to the surf where large concentrations of menhaden are schooling. Offshore fishermen will also find cobia following hooked bottom fish up to the boat often completely catching fishermen off guard. Jetty and bay fishermen will also hook up with hard fighting cobia while fishing on the bottom with blue crabs, menhaden, mullet and large shrimp as well.

 One of the better areas when targeting cobia includes the deep jetty waters of the St. Mary's inlet during the last of the in-coming tide. Anchor your fishing boat just south of the very tip of the south jetty rocks and fish back towards the inlet and right on the bottom.

 Gag grouper season opens on May 1st where bottom fishermen will be targeting these hard fighting, delicious eating bottom dwellers with heavy fishing gear. Fifty-pound terminal fishing line and a four-foot section of 100-pound fluorocarbon shock leader is a must. A 4 to 6-ounce egg weight is threaded onto the shock leader and is allowed to rest right on a 7/0 kahle hook. This bottom rig is commonly referred to as a “Knocker rig”. Best bottom fishing baits includes live pinfish, grunts or fresh squid.

 Shark fishing also improves during the month of May both at offshore wrecks, ledges and nearshore inlets too. Some of the best shark action comes while drifting dead baits with behind a working shrimp boat that has just cleaned it's catch. Shrimp boats discarding their bi catch will also attract hard fighting tarpon, cobia and fast swimming kingfish too.

 Offshore live bait trolling at the “Amberjack Hole” and “East FC” live bottoms will produce king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, cobia, barracuda and the occasional blackfin tuna. A solid game plan is to jig up a live baitwell full of Spanish sardines and cigar minnows at a nearby live bottom and rig them to your terminal trolling tackle. During the early morning hours striking fish are more apt to feed close to the surface and then deep during the heat of day.

 Giant schools of red drum will be prowling the beaches offering some of the very best light tackle fishing of the year for both light tackle spin fishermen and fly fishermen too. Simply look for large areas of surface disturbance where red drum weighing to 40-pounds are ravaging large schools of menhaden.

 Excellent sea trout and redfish fishing is also available during the month of May in the back country. Timing is critical as fishing is best when a good running tide is flooding oyster beds where huge concentrations of finger mullet are present as well. A flooding early morning tide is key, particularly when arriving around mid-morning. As days grow older the heat of the day seems to slow down the trout bite.

 Some of the larger sea trout and redfish are taking surface plugs fished along the edges of finger mullet schools. A local favorite is the Storm “Chug Bug” head and white body color pattern. The popular trout lure also has a sound chamber where led balls rattle against their plastic chamber, which ultimately imitates croaker grunting. Also, the loud popping sounds created by the “Chug Bug”, imitates game fish smacking live shrimp right on the surface.

 When mullet schools are not numerous, a variety of sub surface plugs work will for summer sea trout. Include the Mirror Lure’s S25MR/Catch 5 in the mullet color pattern. And don’t overlook casting a ¼ ounce led head jig rigged with a 3-inch Berkley Gulp shrimp in the white, or new penny color patterns.

 Finally drifting a 3 to 5-inch live finger mullet, or pogy under a small float is also a deadly fishing tactic for summer sea trout and redfish.

 Surf fishermen will be targeting excellent eating whiting, pompano, yellow mouth trout and more. Fishing with fresh shrimp, or sand fleas during a flooding tide is key. Look for some of the best surf fishing action to come where shallow bars offer an ambush point for game fish.

 Beach fishermen will need to obtain a free shark fishing license when targeting sharks along the beaches. Sharks must be released right away and can not be dragged up on the beach. For more shark fishing information, please visit www.myfwc.com.

 For more fishing and charter fishing information please call 904-261-2870, or visit www.ameliaangler.com.