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HOT SPOTS: What's biting and where

By NICK WALTER
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Tarpon fishing has been slowing way down off the beaches, but beach snook fishing has not.

Some captains like to target beach snook with threadfins as opposed to lively pinfish that are tougher for snook to chase down. Others, such as Capt. Josh Peurifoy, prefer artificials such as a Yo-Zuri 3D minnow or flies that match the small greenback that are in those areas.

Also, mangrove snapper are still abundant and can be caught around just about any rock pile or dock piling. "I've never seen so many mangrove snapper in my life," Capt. T.J. Stewart said.

Hurricane Dolly produced some Gulf swells this week to about 4 feet that had some nearshore anglers heading inshore.

Sunshine Skyway Pier

Dick Leitz from the south pier said there's a tremendous amount of small Spanish mackerel with a few big ones thrown in. They are getting bigger - the Spanish that averaged 6-8 inches are now averaging 10 inches.

Anglers also are catching mangrove snapper, occasional grouper and Key West grunts. Tarpon are all over the place, and Leitz has seen a few cobia rolling around.

Some anglers caught a few black seabass, but dolphins were waiting to snatch them up. Capt. Stewart reported hit-and-miss action on tarpon.

Terra Ceia Bay

Capt. Rick Gross said snook fishing has been productive around Rattlesnake Island.

Capt. Peurifoy reported redbreast in backwater areas of the bay. Peurifoy also had success fly-fishing for bonito in the bait-rich bay.

Manatee River

Small tarpon and big snook should be lying around the bridges, and anglers can target them at night. Redfish reportedly had been in some of the backcountry areas and on the outside of canals.

Tampa Bay

Capt. Gross fished artificial reefs in Tampa Bay, one by Egmont Key, for nonstop action on mangrove snapper, as well as redbreast, Spanish mackerel, speckled trout, lane snapper and bluefish.

Capt. Tom Chaya hit the hard-bottom areas of lower Tampa Bay, working bait schools with small Spanish sardines for Spanish mackerel from 16-22 inches and mangrove snapper around rock piles.

Capt. Ray Markham, fishing rocks between Passage Key and Egmont, landed a few tarpon, trout to 22 inches, black seabass, mangrove snapper to 14 inches, snook to 22 inches, Spanish mackerel to 21 inches and grouper to 21 inches (as he fished for tarpon with a D.O.A. bait buster).

Anna Maria Sound/Palma Sola Bay

Capt. Zach Zacharias led a trio of anglers hailing from Indiana to a pretty decent half-day catch Tuesday.

Mangrove snapper topped the charts for sheer numbers, followed by some pretty decent spotted sea trout, flounder, redbreast and ladyfish. Two- to three-inch spanish sardines did the trick on the last of an outgoing and first of the incoming tide.

Sarasota Bay

Capt. Jonnie Walker fished Sarasota Bay on Wednesday and found there are a bunch of Spanish sardines around.

"Everything loves Spanish sardines," Walker said.

The only problem is keeping them alive in the bait well. Still, he landed some big Spanish mackerel, bluefish and trout. Walker released one trout at 25 inches.

Redfish action reportedly has been great in the southwest side of the bay. Also, some divers reported some of the reef balls in the bay have held some keeper grouper. Capt. Mark Johnston reported some trout and catch-and-release snook around Long Bar.

Longboat Pass

The pass is loaded with mangrove snapper and also has been holding trout, flounder, redbreast and ladyfish.

Beaches and Gulf

Capt. Mark Johnston fished with Capt. Sam Kimball (both of Legend Charters) on Wednesday for some Key West grunts, nice mangrove snapper (one was five pounds) and Spanish mackerel from 3 to 7 miles offshore. Red snapper reportedly had been thick 30-plus miles offshore around ledges.

Bradenton River/Lake Evers

Look for bluegill on their beds and bass lying off those beds. Target the bass with small bluegill imitators with No. 14 hooks. Speckled perch likely are in deep water.

Myakka River State Park

For the past month, bluegill has been the hot bite, and they've been big. Water levels are finally up, and it's worth trying to put more than just a Jon boat in.

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