



# The Bahamas Fall Fishing Forecast

By Capt. Kevin Kates

The calm seas and light breezes of summer come to an abrupt end as we edge our way further into the tropical storm season. Large seas and stronger winds will be commonplace in the Gulf Stream so be sure to pick your crossings carefully. The fall generally signifies a transitional fishing period in the Bahamas and as we approach the New Year, the action will really heat up! You can expect good to excellent results with grouper, snapper, tuna and dolphin but it's the wahoo bite that really gets us excited. Mix in a few billfish and you now have the makings for a world class Bahamas fishing adventure.

In early fall, yellowtail snapper will still be around in full force and chumming around structure in the 50 to 120 foot depths will most definitely find fish. Be careful not to over chum, as you will attract the likings of

sharks which make getting the 'tails to the boat an almost impossible task. Grouper fishing is a solid possibility with plenty of reds found on the hard bottom around Great Isaacs. To spice up your grouper trip, try high speed trolling around the edge to find an early 'hoo or two. Remember, for the high speed trolling gig, two speed reels are a requirement while 50's will do the trick, 80's are the "reel" deal. Fish two baits a little deeper with wire outfits and one way, way back bait on the surface. Sporadic tuna and dolphin bites in the same area will keep you busy.

By Halloween, the wahoo action will be in full swing, peaking just a bit later in December & January. If you can make the crossing during this time of the year, it will definitely be worth the trip. High speed

trolling for wahoo is extreme fishing to the max and has taken over as the most effective method for catching these striped torpedoes. Super fast trolling speeds exceeding 15 knots are the ticket to success throughout the winter off Bimini and Isaacs. Lures being dragged through the water at these extreme speeds seem to make the fish strike on instinct rather than necessity. During a hot bite, scoring double digit catches of 25 to 50 lb. fish is definitely possible and definitely exciting! Giant 'hoos in the 60 to 90 lb. range are around, but of course not as abundant. Incredibly large kingfish are a common by-catch while high speed trolling and more than a few 50+ lb. smokers have been taken. Again, you should be on the lookout for dolphin and tuna as they will keep you busy between wahoo bites. In the beautiful cobalt blue waters, working birds are a sure sign of action.

Here's the deal on high speed wahoo trolling. Try and fish 3 rods and maybe even 4 when seas are cooperative. Fish 2 baits down deep by using wire line or an ultra thin braid such as PowerPro. A minimum of 50 lb. tackle is an absolute must but like I said, 80's are the way to go. For rods, I highly suggest bent butts for the 2 deep baits. Rigging should include 30 to 50 oz. trolling leads with the cable run through the lead and connected to a 20' length of 300 to 400 lb. test shock leader. Finish things off by crimping a heavy duty snap swivel to the other end of your shock leader. This of course is where the leader from your lure is attached. A third lure can be fished way back on the surface with a 12 to 16 oz. trolling lead. The smaller sinker will keep the lure in the water but closer to the top.

At these high speeds, you don't use regular everyday swivels. I assure you, they will not hold up. Spend the extra few bucks and purchase the heavy duty ball bearing type.

Mono, although vulnerable to the wahoo's sharp teeth, works best for your shock leader. Handling these toothy monsters at the boat, especially when multiple hook ups are common, is much easier and safer with monofilament than it is with cable.

At these high speeds, natural bait is not an option. Artificial lures designed for high speed trolling are definitely the only way to go. I like to use lures that are at least 10 to 12 inches in length without being too critical on color. I fish a mix of colors when starting out on any given day and if I see a pattern

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Bimini from above

developing, I adjust accordingly. Most of the time wahoo will eat whatever is presented as long as it is presented fast. Placement of lines, all fished flat should be at lengths of 100 feet, 150 feet and 250 feet. It's a good idea to mark your line once the lures are initially set so that you can return them to the exact position without guessing or hesitation. This can easily be done with wax line or a marker.

Where you focus your efforts is key. All game fish congregate around structure as it draws bait and basically from there, you can follow the food chain up. Off of Bimini and Isaacs the most prevalent form of bottom structure is the drop-off that occurs on the western side of the Great Bahama Bank. Within a few hundred yards of the edge, the bottom drops from 100 to 600 feet. Fishing along the drop-off is accomplished by trolling in an "S" or zig-zag pattern from the outer edge of the reef in 200 feet to 450 feet. Some days the fish are in tight on the drop, other days, they may be just outside. The zig-zag pattern allows you to find where the wahoo are located on that particular day. Usually, most of your strikes will come from that same magic depth.

An additional option during your Island visit is to head a bit further offshore and chase marlin, tuna and dolphin. Though not as prevalent as other times of the year, these species are here

and worth looking for. Of course, if that doesn't pan out, you can always count on deep dropping with electric reels for tasty snapper and grouper. Fish the structure in the deep dark depths ranging from 600 to 1200 feet. Fresh pieces of 'cuda, whole squid or just about anything you can keep on the hook, will do the trick.

A last tip before planning your trip to the Bahamas: Make sure that your vessel and all equipment is in top shape. 35 miles offshore in six foot seas is not the place where you want to be repairing avoidable problems. Check and double check everything and always carry a healthy supply of spare parts. Tools, belts, hoses, plugs, wires, props, extra rope, bring it all! Equally as important is plenty of fuel and ice. Anyhow, the fall months are a great time of the year to thoroughly inspect, repair or replace anything that might have a problem on your boat. When the seas are too rough and you have some extra time on your hands, make sure to have your reels serviced and re-spoiled with fresh line. There's really no sense in taking a trip over to the Islands only to lose your trophy catch because of old chaffed line. And trust me when I tell you, when the wahoo action is fired up, you need all your equipment to be at its best.

Plan a trip over, be well prepared and a little flexible in the event of rough seas and you'll have the trip of a lifetime. ➔



Capt. Kevin Kates has been fishing the south Florida area for over 22 years. Kevin has run private yachts and fished most of the eastern coast of Florida as well as the Keys and Bahamas. His tournament rigged 31' Contender - Intrinsic Value – can take full advantage of all the east coast fishing opportunities. Whether it be making a day trip to the Bahamas, going offshore at night for swordfish, or staying in close for kingfish, blackfin tuna, sailfish, or whatever is biting, Capt. Kevin Kates ensures success.

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