

the bahamas

SUMMER FISHING FORECAST

By Capt. Kevin Kates

YES!!!

It's finally summer, the most exciting season to fish the Islands. I for one am thrilled that the weather is finally stable enough to make the crossing on a regular basis. Granted Florida has great fishing, but not like the unspoiled Islands. Both inshore and off the bountiful opportunities are endless. Let's stop wasting time and get right to the good stuff.

OFFSHORE:

Big blue marlin, lots of dolphin and plenty of yellowfin tuna are all realistic expectations. All the way from Walkers Cay to Cat Island, the deep water bite will be red hot! NOTE: Walkers Cay Marina is closed and is not currently renting dock space.

The pinnacle of blue water excitement, blue marlin will pop up just about anywhere throughout the chain. Rather than pinpointing specific locations, let's discuss tactics. Big fish require big tackle. 50's, 80's and even 130's are the name of the game from here on out. I would hate to have a 500 lb. blue jump on a bait fished off a lightweight 20 lb. outfit. The greyhounding fish would put an end to the fight before it even started.

The trick to finding a marlin is focusing on areas containing the highest combination of the following factors:

- Deep water (500' +)
- Concentrations of bait
(Remember that bait to big marlin consists of dolphin, tuna and big mackerel, not small sardines & tiny herring)
- Distinct color changes
- Temperature breaks, either vertical temperature breaks or horizontal thermoclines.
- Floating debris
- Birds
- Surface Slicks
- Underwater seamounts, canyons or other well defined bottom contours.

Troll these areas with large skirted lures and freshly rigged dead baits. Big Spanish mackerel and bonito make perfect offerings. A live peanut dolphin is also an ideal way to entice surface cruising fish. Keep in mind that a marlin can consume a meal as large as 15% of its own body weight, so big baits can never be too big. Regardless of how you target marlin, in June & July you'll definitely increase your odds by fishing during the early morning or late afternoon hours. A white will pop up every now and then, but it's the big blues that keep anglers coming back.

In these same areas yellowfin tuna will be crowd pleasers. Often, the tuna are extremely cooperative. Throughout the summer months, bullet shaped trolling

lures, cedar plugs and trolling feathers will account for excellent yellowfin catches. Fish the lures way behind the boat and intercept pods of fast moving fish. Bird activity and crashes on the surface will be dead-give-a-ways to the tuna's exact location. If your well is full of pilchards, toss a net-full over the side followed by a hooked bait. Within seconds you'll be hooked up! Pilchards can easily be caught throughout the Islands and there are even a number of local bait boats that will top off your well with more livies than you will ever need for less than a hundred bucks. Ask the locals to point you in the right direction.

A fair number of blackfin tuna will be scattered in but it's the yellowfin that reign supreme as a solid 100 lb. fish will have even experienced anglers begging to hand off the rod. Once they employ their 'death circles', the trick to landing these incredibly powerful fish is all about technique. Short, consistent pumps with a beefy stand-up rod are required in order to keep the tuna's head pointed upwards. If the fish's head is pointing down, his propulsion system (tail) is driving him away from you. On the other hand, if you keep the fish's head angled upwards, even slightly, then his tail is pushing him toward you. In addition, do not try and pump the rod or even try and gain any line on a tuna that's screaming in the other direction. These brief intervals are the only time



"A WHITE WILL POP UP EVERY NOW AND THEN, BUT IT'S THE BIG BLUES THAT KEEP ANGLERS COMING BACK."

BBC

you should be resting. Remember, when you ease off, the fish rests. And a rejuvenated 100 pound yellowfin will beat you down!

“JUST ABOUT ANY FLOATING DEBRIS OR OFFSHORE BUOY WILL HOLD DOLPHIN.”

To really spice things up, June, July and August are prime dolphin months.

I don't mean little 2 to 5 lb. dolphin either, I mean real slob! Fish in the 30 to 50 lb. range are not uncommon. The east side of Andros, Cat Cay, Cat Island and San Salvador along with just about everywhere in between will hold some concentrations of fish. As a matter of fact, throughout the summer months anglers often find themselves running away from schools of giant mahi's to search for more glorified marlin. Can you imagine!

Just about any floating debris or offshore buoy will hold dolphin. The largest will usually be found out in the deep (4000' to 6000') so don't be afraid to keep going!

Just when you thought all this outrageous offshore action couldn't get any better, here come the wahoo. Sleek, voracious and super fast! Wahoo around the islands average 30 to 40 lbs. but do get much, much bigger. Giant hoo's reaching staggering numbers patrol the eastern edge of this incredible island chain. For even a chance at one of these monsters, 80 and 130 pound gear is a requirement as are cable leaders and heavy, high speed lures. Look for the real giant 'hoos around San Salvador and Cat Island.



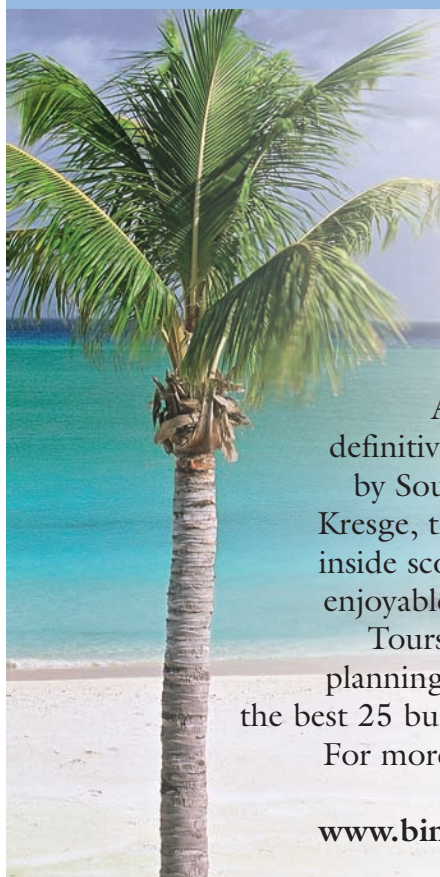
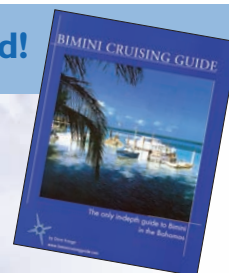
Famed marine artist Carey Chen (right) with a bull dolphin caught near east Andros.

Carey Chen

Don and Angie Stacks out of Singer Island caught this 100 lb slob and boated 4 others this past April.



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Philip shows off a small tarpon caught on fly

blistering mid-day heat. Another trick for success is hooking up with a local guide. There are countless native flats guides who will put you smack dab in the middle of remote shallows that see very little pressure. Trophy ten pound bones are extremely uncommon here but the sheer numbers of small fish will make up for the loss in size.

Throughout the summer, Bahamian bones will quickly inhale hairy crustacean imitations, soft plastic baits and live baits. The combination of a shrimp tipped jig is an all time favorite here. In June and July, you may also have the opportunity to pursue an occasional permit, especially around Red Shank and Burroughs Cays. Justin Sands, a guide from Abaco, claims that thru the end of July, visiting anglers can expect up to 10 shots a day at bones, a handful of permit and even the occasional tarpon. His anglers seldom leave disappointed.

As for the tarpon, Justin says there are always small resident fish to be found but only targets them when a client is looking for a 'Grand Slam'. He says the east side of the Islands are the best. Abaco Marles is one of his favorite tarpon spots although the Marles should not be attempted without an experienced guide as there are numerous rocks resulting in a tricky area to get in and out of.

INSHORE:

For those not looking for such extremes, equally as exciting as the heart-pounding offshore opportunities are the inshore waters. Bonefish, tarpon, permit, barracuda, jacks and a variety of sharks inhabit Bahamian shallows, and on any given day in the summer at least a couple of the species are eager to provide you with lasting memories. Personal preferences aside, catching a few fish in the shallows will add a new dimension for that 'total' sport fishing excursion.

Bonefish are the most sought after thin water species. Luckily, they can be found cruising the flats surrounding just about every piece of real estate. Early morning or late day hours will again be the best. You'll find that the majority of the bones will be seeking refuge during the



Madison is happy with her bonefish



"THROUGHOUT THE SUMMER, BAHAMIAN BONES WILL QUICKLY INHALE HAIRY CRUSTACEAN IMITATIONS, SOFT PLASTIC BAITS AND LIVE BAITS. KEEP IN MIND, EARLY MORNING OR LATE DAY HOURS ARE BEST DURING SUMMER."

Kevin Kates (3)

NEAR-SHORE REEFS:

During the summer months, the bottom fishing in the Bahamas seems to be at its peak. Numerous varieties of snapper and grouper call these ledges home and they're often very hungry. To quickly get the action started, anchor above any hard bottom in 60 plus feet of water and deploy a chum bag. Don't chum too heavy though, as you'll quickly be invaded by pesky sharks. When they do move in, you should move out as it becomes next to impossible to reel in anything but a head. Reef fishing under the cover of darkness is a good bet for increasing your odds and remember, the most incredible mutton fishing occurs around the full moon so plan your trip accordingly.

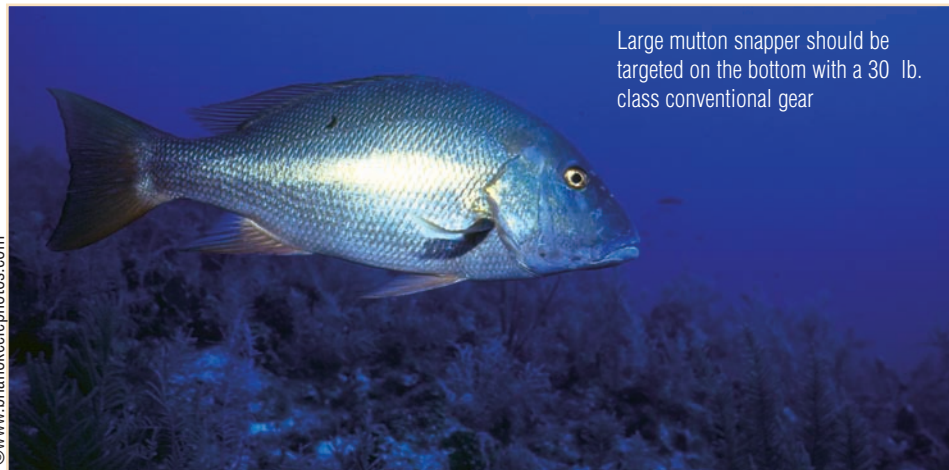
There's an endless list of locations throughout the Bahamas where anglers can consistently score on reef species. It would be impossible to list them all. Key areas to focus on should contain pronounced jagged reefs coupled with a fairly stiff current. Once on location, you've got some options. You can feed baits out to flag yellowtails in your slick with a medium action spinning rod or you can target larger mutton snapper and a variety of grouper right on the bottom with a 30 to 50 lb. class conventional outfit. When it comes to the perfect bottom bait, all the usuals will do the trick, although my experience has proven that a fresh ballyhoo plug is deadly! It's also not a bad idea to present a live bait or two on the surface for that curious blackfin, dolphin or mackerel that might come by.

Deep dropping over in the Islands is another promising opportunity. Look for unique yelloweye and queen snapper to make up the majority of the catch. There are a number of worthy deep water haunts you may want to check out. The east side of Chub near Whale Cay, has consistently yielded outstanding results. Deep dropping does require specialized tackle but the rewards are usually well worth the effort.

Deep dropping in the summer is ideal. The wind is usually minimal thus making it easier to hold the bottom some 500 to 1200 feet below. Deep dropping can be equally rewarding day or night as not very much light penetrates to those depths anyway.

Large mutton snapper should be targeted on the bottom with a 30 lb. class conventional gear

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Regardless of when you decide to cross over to the islands, be sure to keep a close eye on the weather forecast. As you're reading this report, hurricane season may already be upon us. Trust me; you do not want to get stuck on a small un-inhabited island somewhere in the Bahamas with a category 5 hurricane barreling down on you. As a safety precaution, leave a copy of your itinerary with a close friend or relative. Many South Florida boaters take crossing the Gulf Stream and running around unknown territories for granted — and shouldn't. All it takes is a few seconds of bad luck or just being at the wrong place at the wrong time and you'll find out the hard way that preparation is definitely the key to having a fun and more importantly, safe trip. Pick the Bahamas as a sport fishing vacation destination. You'll be rewarded with plenty of action! And we all know that's all it takes for a guaranteed good time.



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Capt. Kevin Kates

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- White Marlin
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- Dolphin
- Wahoo
- Kingfish
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- Grouper
- Snapper

We can take a day trip to the Bahamas or go at night for Swordfish, stay close to shore for Kingfish, Blackfin Tuna, Sailfish, or whatever is biting. We have the capability to trailer Intrinsic Value to where the fish are, so we have more time on the water with your rod bent rather than being where the fish aren't. I mainly run the boat out of Hillsboro Inlet but if the conditions aren't right I'll pull the boat and we'll go to the fish. Whether it's Elliott Key or Stuart we will find the fish!

Let's Go Fishing!

Local: (954) 725-9662 e-mail: capt.kev@catch-fish.com
Toll Free: (800) 256-8042 website: www.catch-fish.com



About THE WRITER



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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