

# How to Catch **Fish of Month-Redfish!**

## **Watch the tides to catch some of the best sight-Redfishing of the year**

*By Shane Edgar –Internet Article Edited For Space and Content*

Redfish on the Florida flats usually average from 15 to 32 inches long, with some occasional bruisers over 32 inches. Their main diet consists of crustaceans, shrimp and crabs, pinfish and other baitfish. When a redfish searches the bottom for prey, its tail tilts up. If the water is shallow enough, that tail will breach the surface. Sometimes barely the tip of the tail will swirl above the surface, and at times, the redfish will go almost vertical with the full tail exposed.

### **When and where do you find these fish?**

The tide must be low enough on the flats to allow you to see those tails. Get out your tide tables and navigation charts. Average-size redfish tail in anywhere from six inches to two feet of water. Study a tide table to find out when certain favorite grassflats will be at the right tailing tide. In Southwest Florida, look for a tide that is less than 1.0 feet in depth. This mean average puts most shallow flats at the right depth. It's best to go out on those extreme low-tide days when the tide drops below the 0.0 mark in order to study the bottom contour to find out which flats are deeper, which are exposed, and which are in the perfect range. Check your local newspaper, tide Web sites, or the Florida Sportsman Fishing Planner for local tide information.

Tide flow is important, as well. A moving tide excites both bait and redfish. Usually the last part of the outgoing tide and the first part of the incoming are when you're most likely to find reds cruising to their next tailing stop.

The best months to look for tailing redfish on the lower Gulf coast fall in Florida's cool season. At this time of year, various astronomic, oceanographic and geographic factors coincide to make for the lowest of low tides. This, accompanied by north or east winds, can create an even lower tide for this coastline. **The best times throughout the day are three to four hours after sunrise and three to**

**four hours before sunset.** Redfish don't tail as well during the middle of the day. The fish funnel into deeper water when they leave the shallow flats.

Redfish don't tail just anywhere the tide is considered "right." They won't be tailing if there's nothing to feed on. Search for lush grassflats teeming with baitfish, shrimp or crabs. On Florida's Gulf coast, look for a flat with turtlegrass. Turtlegrass is the most common of seagrasses throughout Florida and the Caribbean. The distinctive blades are flat and ribbon-like, growing up to a foot long and ½-inch wide.

Use other animals to help you find tailing redfish, too. Wading birds—blue herons, various egrets and spoonbills—all search for the same food as redfish. Also watch for mullet and small schools of baitfish. Seek out stingrays. Redfish follow rays, eating the extra food kicked up. Look for the telltale flap of both of the ray's wings to find redfish in tow.

Polarized sunglasses don't help you see the tails. The advantage to using polarized sunglasses is to see what is under the water's surface; however, what you are looking for is above the surface. Use the glare of the water to your advantage.

Redfish get spooked and will flee at any unnatural sound or movement. The best way to approach them is to use a stealthy craft such as a kayak or canoe. You can pick up a decently outfitted kayak for under \$1,000. Wading can be another great option in hunting redfish. Many grassflats in Florida are wadeable in the winter when the tides are lower. If there is too much ground to cover or the water is too deep to wade, use your boat as your mothership to the fishing grounds. Anchor in deeper water, and then get out to wade. Just remember, in an outgoing tide it's important to anchor in deep enough water, or you'll be waiting for the tide to get higher for quite a while. Be careful while boating near dense grassflats so as not to damage them with your propeller. It's best to use a trolling motor or pushpole to navigate in and out of a grassy area. The grass maintains this beautiful fishery we have, and we need to do our part in preserving it.

Congratulations! You have found a tailing redfish. Now what? Redfish aren't too picky most of the time. Live shrimp and crabs work well, along with cut mullet and other baitfish. Redfish have an excellent sense of smell. Breaking the shrimp tail off will put the scent in the water and if you rig it "Texas" style, it will be weedless. Be bold, bite the tail off, and with a 1/0 or 2/0 live bait hook (depending on the size of the shrimp), run the hook into the end of the tail and out the under side. Turn the hook around and bury the hook in the body of the shrimp, toward the

shell. The hook point will not be exposed, therefore weedless. Cast it as close to them as possible without hitting them on the head (or tail) and they'll sniff it out. If the cast is too long, drag the bait back into the zone and let it settle. For more distance, add a small split shot just above the hook eye. If they're feeding in the column, instead of off the bottom, a popping cork can be used.

However, it's much more rewarding to catch tailing redfish on artificial lures. With the presence of the thick grass around, it's best to use a weedless presentation. A scented soft lure, such as the **Gulp!** or **Slurp** baits, works well. Braided polyethylene line in 10- to 15-pound test is the best choice for longer casts and higher sensitivity. Fluorocarbon is the best choice in leader material, in 15- to 20-pound test.

Now that you're tied on, you are ready to cast. First determine which way the redfish is pointing. You can do this by looking at the shape of the tail and where it aims. You also have to figure out how the redfish is acting. If it's a "happy" fish and is stationary for a while with its tail out of the water, you have a better chance at getting a good cast to it. With these fish, cast a few feet beyond the fish and a foot in front of it. Keep your rod tip high and reel somewhat quickly so that your bait or artificial offering skims the top of the water. When you see it's where the redfish is looking, drop the offering and hope the redfish sees or smells it. Sometimes you have to make several casts on the same fish, particularly if the fish is dirtying the water around it and cannot easily see your lure. You may have to wait for the tail to go down to begin your retrieve so that the fish has a better view of its surroundings.

If the tail periodically comes out of the water, and then moves a few feet and tails again, you're going to have to cast quickly in its direction so that you don't lose it on its next move. Sometimes blind-casting to these quick-moving fish when they are on the move is the best technique. The only problem is if the line comes over its back or if the cast is anywhere near the fish, it may spook off without allowing for another attempt. You may find a group of tailing redfish in the same small area; the best way to target these fish is to pick the fish on the outer edge first. Cast to the edge of the school so you don't spook one fish, which would eventually spook the whole school.

Redfish are usually happy to provide tailing targets, but there are other species that tail as well. Black drum tail and are usually larger. Seatrout tail; so do pompano. But redfish are here, now.