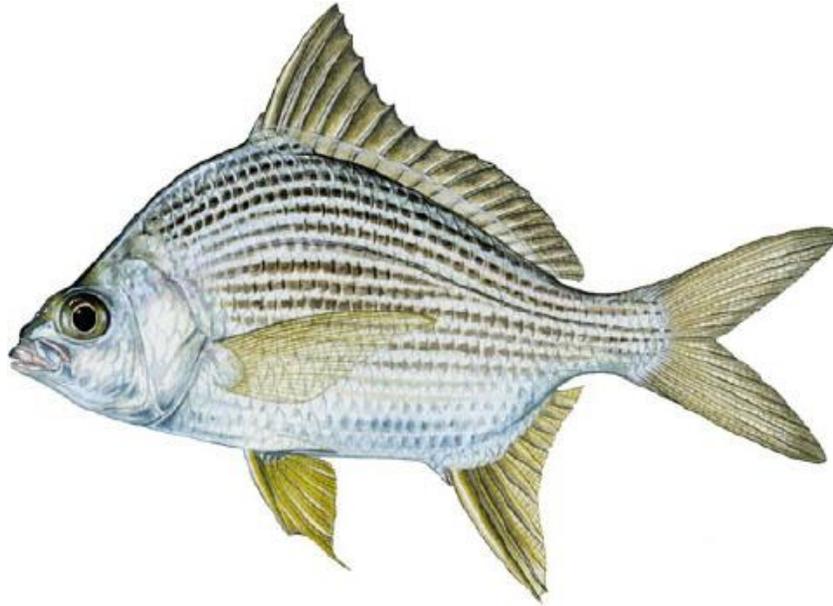


**JULY'S BEST BET
SEBASTIAN INLET STATE PARK**



SANDPERCH

(Diapterus auratus\Diapterus plumieri)

DESCRIPTION: Sandperch, also known as Irish pompano, exhibit a plain, silvery appearance with the outer edge of the first dorsal fin sometimes being black. Members of the mojarras, or Gerreidae family, sandperch are coastal fishes with protrusible mouths, used mainly for catching bottom-dwelling invertebrates. *Diapterus auratus* is easily identified from other inlet mojarras (which are more commonly used as baitfish) by its larger size and strong spines present in its anal and dorsal fins. Irish pompano range from N.E. Florida (Cape Canaveral) and Greater Antilles to Brazil. Another species, *Diapterus plumieri*, or striped mojarras, may be found side by side with the Irish pompano and are also locally termed and grouped as "sandperch." The two species can be difficult to distinguish from one another. These fishes favor coastal regions as bays, estuaries and inlets, and as their nick-name implies they prefer grassy or sandy open bottoms. Both species may obtain about a foot in length. The all tackle world record striped mojarras was caught in West Palm Beach in 1987 and weighed 2lb, 4oz.

HEIGHT OF SEASON: Sandperches are most prevalent in the Sebastian Inlet area during the summer months of June, July, and August.

RULES AND REGULATIONS: There are currently no laws regulating the size, seasons, and bag limits for sandperches in the State of Florida. Take only what you can use. Keep up to date on changing rules and regulations. You will need a saltwater fishing license.

TIMES AND TIDES: Sandperches can be caught throughout the day at Sebastian Inlet, and possibly into the night. Good catches can come during either tide, incoming or outgoing.

BAITS: Sandperches and mojarras being bottom dwelling species with small mouths prefer smaller baits presented on or near the bottom. Excellent catches can be made using small pieces of fresh dead shrimp, clams, crabs, or sandfleas. Cut, fresh shrimp seems to be the preferred bait by most inlet sandperch anglers.

TACKLE: Being that sandperch species do not attain great sizes, just about any type of fishing tackle can be

used in an effort to catch them. "Ultralight" gear, or similar gear as used in fishing for freshwater panfish, is certainly all that is required, and would perhaps make the quest a bit more "fun." Baits and hooks should be small enough that the sandperch can be caught! Hooks no bigger than 1\0 should be used for sandperch. Small pieces of cut shrimp or clam should not exceed lengths of 1\2 inch so that they may compliment the hook being used. Sliding sinker rigs or 2 hook tandem rigs are preferred sandperch tackle. Use just enough lead to hold the bottom.

METHOD: The best areas for catching sandperch at Sebastian Inlet are found almost entirely on the south half of the park. The ocean side of the south jetty is probably the single most productive area for sandperch fishing at the inlet with the L-dock area (by the campground) and the south shore lining the inlet (near the tall green clump of pines) being the next best areas. Sandperch may also be caught in the cove area on the north side of the park. Try to fish the sandy areas for sandperch. If you are snagging rocks frequently it is probably not a great area for them. When water conditions become extremely clear at the inlet, try fishing areas that seem a bit more "off color" or stirred up for better action, perhaps near the break in the surf, or where brown river water may be mixing with the clear ocean water.

PREPARATION: Prepare your fish how you enjoy it best. Due to their small size, sandperch are best to me prepared as "panfish." This is simply done by scaling the fish and removing the insides. Removing the head of the fish is optional. In this way the fish can be pan fried, deep fried, or broiled when afterwards the meat easily pulls from the bones. Sandperches are excellent tablefare. Remember to keep your catch cooled down before preparation, especially during the hot summer months!

ALSO THIS MONTH: July can also show good fishing for lookdowns and mangrove snapper, with the chance of a Spanish mackerel or permit showing up on the jetties. Blue runners are also very common in July and many say they make for fair eating. Remember that snook season is closed now for the summer.

Ranger Ed Perry