

SEPTEMBER'S BEST BET
SEBASTIAN INLET STATE PARK



REDFISH
(*Sciaenops ocellatus*)

DESCRIPTION: Also known as red drum, channel bass, or simply “reds,” redfish possess an elongated body and an overall bronze coloration, being darker above. Redfish usually have a conspicuous black spot, or spots, on the tail fin and sometimes these spots may extend forward along the dorsal area of the fish’s body. Redfish have a wide range, living in waters as far north as Massachusetts, extending south around the peninsula of Florida and into northern Mexico. Redfish grow to be one of the largest fish in the drum family, only topped by the black drum here in the Atlantic. The Florida record redfish weighs 51lbs. 8ozs., but the species attains sizes almost twice this weight. The all tackle world record for the species registers at 94lbs. 2ozs. Spawning of this species occurs from August to November in nearshore waters where adult fish, roughly 4 years in age and 30 or more inches in length, gather together. Younger fish thrive in inshore waters, especially those of estuaries, where the species feeds on fish, mollusks, and especially crustaceans. Redfish are thought to live some 20 years or longer.

HEIGHT OF SEASON: Redfish are present in the Sebastian Inlet area year around, moving between the river flats and the ocean’s coastal zone, however their peak months of activity seem to center around the fall season, with September and October being two of the best months for trying to catch them in the inlet.

RULES AND REGULATIONS: Redfish have a daily recreational bag limit of 1(one) fish per angler in the state of Florida. Redfish must have an overall length not less than 18 inches and not more than 27 inches in order to be kept (“slot measurement”). Redfish must remain in whole condition until landed ashore (with heads and tails intact). One cannot buy or sell native redfish, and gigging, spearing, and snagging of redfish is prohibited. It is unlawful to use any multiple hook in conjunction with live or dead natural baits when attempting to catch or catching redfish. Measure your fish correctly, lay a tape flat and directly underneath the fish to obtain a concise point to point measurement. Never lay a tape over a fish and expect to obtain an accurate measurement. Keep up to date on changing rules and regulations. You will need a saltwater fishing license.

TIMES AND TIDES: Redfish may be taken any time through the day or night and at any phase of the tide. The best indicator of what to expect on any given day is to find out what happened the day before. This information can be sought at the tackle shop or from other local anglers (or obtained first hand by you!). Some of the best times to catch redfish at Sebastian Inlet come during dusk hours, off of the two jetties, especially during outgoing tides.

BAITS: Redfish are known for their eagerness to accept just about all types of saltwater baits, natural and artificial. Here at Sebastian Inlet a majority of the redfish are taken on natural baits, live or dead, with live

being the best. Small fish such as mullets, pinfish, mojarras, and croakers are ideal baits along with crustaceans such as shrimp and blue crabs. If using dead natural baits try to use fresh dead or iced down baits. Never leave dead baits in the sun for long and expect them to still be appetizing to most gamefish. Redfish will also readily strike most saltwater artificials when they are presented correctly. Some of the better artificials to use at Sebastian Inlet are the heavier types like grub tails, jigs, bucktails, and spoons.

TACKLE: Saltwater fishing gear in the 10-20lb class is best when seeking redfish. These strong inlet bruisers can sometimes scale over 40lbs, and tough tackle may be needed to land them in the inlet's strong currents. When fishing natural baits, again I feel the sliding sinker rig best presents these baits for the inlet setting. Match hook sizes to bait sizes, hooks in the 1\0 to 4\0 range are commonly used when seeking redfish. Monofilament leaders in the 30-40lb class should be ample for fighting these small-toothed (conical in shape, not serrated) predators. As with most inlet fishing, use just enough lead to drift your bait close to the bottom if you are fishing the channel, and just enough lead to hold bottom if you are fishing the ocean.

METHOD: Redfish are apt to be taken at just about any spot in the inlet area throughout the season. "Hot spots" change from day to day, week to week, or even tide to tide. Good areas to fish this time of the year include both jetties, the L-dock area on the south side of the park, the "swamp" on the north side of the channel's shore (wade accessible, by the Australian Pines, north side), and the river flats just immediately north and south of the inlet's main channel. When fishing the channel, drift live baits with the current with just enough lead to "bounce" the bottom or stay just above it. This is one of the most productive ways to catch inlet redfish, as well as snook.

PREPARATION: Redfish are best filleted with the skin removed. I go one step further and remove the rib cage and the feather bones from the fillet. Of course the Cajuns made redfish famous by the "blackening" method, cooking the meat with heavy spices, but this is not the only way redfish is good. Traditional ways of deep-frying or oven broiling are great ways to enjoy the fish's true flavor.

ALSO THIS MONTH: Look for snook action to be good to hot, especially for those throwing bucktails at night, or fishing live croakers or pinfish during the day. Flounder should start to make a showing and predatory fish in general should be active during this peak month of the fall mullet run—you never know when a jack, tarpon, ladyfish, shark or mackerel may latch onto your bait!

Looking forward to the cooler weather!,

Ranger Ed Perry