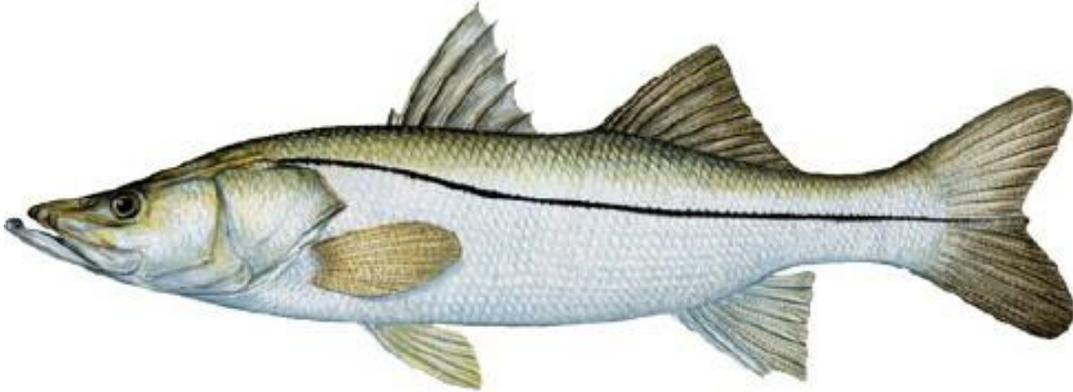


**OCTOBER'S BEST BET
SEBASTIAN INLET STATE PARK**



SNOOK
(*Centropomus undecimalis*)

DESCRIPTION: The common snook, *Centropomus undecimalis*, is one of four species of snook found in Florida's waters. Here at Sebastian Inlet it mixes with the fat snook and the tarpon snook, both of which are smaller species. The fourth, the swordspine snook, full grown at under 12 inches in length, is common in Southern Florida. Snook are characterized by their silvery, yellow body color offset by a prominent dark stripe (lateral line) running almost the entire length of each side of the fish. The common snook ranges as far north as South Carolina, around Florida's coast into Texas and south into Brazil. Mostly being an inshore and nearshore fish, snook are commonly found in coastal and brackish waters. Snook are believed to spawn primarily during summer months, forming schools along shores, inlets, and passes for this reason. Snook are intolerable of water temperatures below 60 degrees Fahrenheit. Snook are a prized gamefish and foodfish among anglers and are exempt from commercial harvest. The all tackle record common snook was caught in Costa Rica and weighed 53lb, 10oz. The Florida record weighs 44lbs, 3oz.

HEIGHT OF SEASON: Snook are common in the Sebastian Inlet area year around. They disappear from the area only when weather conditions drop the water temperature below some unknown measure. During exceptionally warm winters snook may remain in the inlet area. Peak months of fishing occur for them in the spring from April to May, and again in the fall from October to November.

RULES AND REGULATIONS: Snook can only be harvested recreationally and by hook and line means only. Use of a multiple hook in conjunction with live or dead natural baits is unlawful and snatching (snagging) is prohibited. The Atlantic season on snook is closed 4-1/2 months of the year, from December 15th to January 31st and all of June, July, and August. A daily recreational bag limit exists of one (1) fish per individual-- this fish must not measure less than 28 inches, or more than 32 inches in overall length. It is unlawful to buy or sell snook. When the saltwater fishing license applies (is required) for an angler, he or she must have a snook stamp to harvest snook. Keep up to date on changing rules and regulations. You will need a saltwater fishing license.

TIMES AND TIDES: Snook are known to be mainly night time feeders and a majority of the inlet snook are taken by anglers fishing night time, outgoing tides. Of course this is not concrete, and fish are taken during daylight hours (especially during rough weather) and also during incoming tides. Feeding activity varies from day to day or week to week and the single best predictor of what to expect on any given day is to find out what happened the day before.

BAITS: Snook will feed on a variety of natural and artificial baits at Sebastian Inlet. Of course the best baits are the live, natural baits that the snook have the opportunity of feeding on themselves in the inlet. These choice baits vary through the seasons. Fall is a great time to catch snook on live mullet, croakers, pinfish, and pigfish, while springtime is more apt to produce nice catches on live shrimp, mojarras, or pilchards. The best bait to use is what happens to be most prevalent in the inlet at that time. If you hear of the mullet run being good at the inlet, use mullet for bait! If you hear the shrimp ran strong for a few nights then the snook will probably be feeding on shrimp! Artificial baits that work best in the inlet are of the jig types such as lead headed grubs, bucktails, and tube jigs. Snook can also be taken on swimming plugs, especially at night. Brands of bombers, windcheaters, and mavericks are proven to be deadly on snook. The best coloring for these artificial lures depends on angler preference but chartreuse, red/white, and pink seem to be favorites among inlet snook anglers.

TACKLE: Saltwater tackle in the 15-20 lb. class is generally used in inlet snook fishing—most anglers prefer spinning gear while others still like using baitcasting gear, especially when using larger live baits. Whether you are fishing live baits or artificials, heavy monofilament leaders in the 40-60lb range are used in rigging. A sliding sinker rig is fished with live baits, generally at a length of 18-24 inches. Hook sizes should comparably match the size of the bait being used, allowing the bait to move naturally. Lead should be just enough to let the bait drift with the current, but keep it at about mid-water or just above the bottom. Never anchor baits in moving water when snook fishing! Snook often lie waiting for the current to bring them their prey by and if your bait doesn't look like the natural drift—snook will not strike it! Have some type of landing net with you when fishing; do not rely on others. Drop nets work great from the north jetty and catwalks while short handled nets are good for shore and wading anglers.

METHOD: Again, try to keep in mind that your bait (artificial or live) must look as natural as possible for snook to strike it. Avoid unnecessary tackle (beads, clips, etc.) when rigging. If the current is moving in the area where you are fishing let your bait move with it! Snook are generally estuarine species that favor areas of cover like mangrove shorelines, seawalls, pilings, and bridges. Fish these areas that look to hold good feeding opportunities for the snook. Watch for bait around you and look for signs of feeding fish. Snook will generally make a loud popping sound when they feed on surface baits and often they will leave the water in a tumbling motion when feeding becomes frenzied. Snook "hotspots" at the inlet include the "pocket" where the surf zone meets the north jetty, the bridge catwalks, the south side cleaning table area, and the tip of the south jetty.

PREPARATION: Snook are best filleted with the rib bones removed. I prefer snook cut up into small "nugget" sizes and then deep-fried. Larger pieces of snook, especially those from larger fish, tend to be somewhat strong if not cut into bite size pieces. Many anglers prefer to "shave" the red meat that lies between the skin and the white meat off of the fillet before cooking. This helps to mild down the flavor of the meat that is otherwise very white and flavorful. Snook meat is textured much like that of grouper and is comparable in taste.

ALSO THIS MONTH: Look for redfish to still be prevalent along with other predatory species such as jacks, ladyfish, and tarpon. Gulf flounder should start to show up this month—the smaller cousins to the doormats of November and December.

Good Luck,

Ranger Ed Perry