The Shellcracker

FLORIDA CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN FISHERIES SOCIETY

http://www.sdafs.org/flafs

July, 2012

President's Message:

As Tropical Storm Debby rotated outside and dumped inches of rain on the Gulf coast of Florida, I was reminded of how fisheries' sampling is often influenced and inconvenienced by weather and of the necessity of safety on the water. On sunny days while launching at a boat ramp, there have been many times in which some member of the public comments on how jealous they are of a weekday on the water. On those days in which the weather is rainy, cold, or generally less than ideal, however, the same onlooker would not envy the harsh conditions in which we sometimes must complete our jobs and is probably safe indoors. The safety of a sampling crew should be an overriding priority, so weather forecasts should be carefully considered before starting a fisheries sampling trip. In my experience, I have never regretted cancelling a trip, but I have regretted being on the water in less than ideal conditions.

Tropical storms and hurricanes preclude sampling efforts, but working around them to complete fisheries' monitoring is necessary especially since these storms can significantly affect ecosystems and fish populations (see special volume of *Estuaries and Coasts* 29(6), December 2006). Some storms, like Tropical Storm Debby, form quickly and result in high precipitation, runoff, tidal height, and wind and flood conditions for several days. As Floridians, we sometimes become complacent during hurricane season, but a thorough hurricane preparedness plan for the workplace and at home can save lives and property. Become familiar with your workplace hurricane preparedness plan and make sure to have a personal plan as well. Information about setting up your own personal hurricane preparedness plan can be found at: http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/prepare/ready.php.

Besides the obvious threat of organized tropical storms and hurricanes, one of the most threatening and dangerous parts of being out sampling day-to-day in Florida is getting caught in a lightning storm. Florida is the most lightning prone state in the country and has, on average, 1.4 million flashes per year, or 24.7 per square mile. The vast majority of lightning injuries and deaths on boats occur on small boats with no cabin, which describes many fisheries sampling vessels. Florida also has twice as many lightning fatalities as any other state (463 from 1959-2011; http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/stats/59-11_fatalities_rates.pdf), so complete lightning avoidance is good policy. When you hear thunder, lightning is within 6 miles with a 30 second lag between the flash and boom (5 seconds per mile). You need to find cover until 30 minutes go by with no strikes (30/30 rule). Winds usually blow towards a thunderstorm, so wind direction plus a decreasing lag between the flash and boom can indicate that the storm is travelling towards your position. On a boat, there is a narrow window of escape, so find cover or get back to the dock as soon as possible.

— Kerry Flaherty

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For additional information on lightning safety:
http://nasdonline.org/document/209/d000007/boating-lightning-protection.html
http://www.lightningsafety.noaa.gov/outdoors.htm

Some local TV stations have real-time maps of lightning strikes (Tampa Bay area: http://www.baynews9.com/content/news/baynews9/weather.html.html [click on Cloud to Ground Lightning]), and lightning activity is also tracked across the continental United States (http://www.lightningstorm.com/).

Upcoming Events

July 15-19, 2012. The 10th International Congress on the Biology of Fishes will be held in Madison, WI. http://www.fishbiologycongress.org/

August 8-14, 2012. Joint Meeting of The American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists and the American Elasmobranch Society - Vancouver, BC (will be held in conjunction with the World Herpetology Congress) http://wch2012vancouver.com/index.php

August 19-23, 2012. 142nd Annual Meeting of the American Fisheries Society. Minneapolis, MN, . http://afs2012.org/

September 1-5, 2012. AQUA 2012. World Aquaculture Society. Prague, Czech Republic . https://www.was.org/WasMeetings/meetings/Default.aspx?code=Aqua2012

Check out our Parent Society's calendar at http://www.fisheries.org/afs/calendar.html for other events not listed here!

Got something you wish to contribute to the Shellcracker? Got an epipleural rib caught in your craw? Email the editor dparkyn@ufl.edu with any articles or information that you would like to be included in the next issue. The deadline for the next issue is Sept 30th, 2012, so sharpen your pencils AND your hooks...

Student Section

Student Research Highlight

Hello my fellow fish people!

I am reporting from Ninilchik, a small coastal town on Alaska's Kenai Peninsula It is located mid-way-up Cook Inlet , a 200-mile long, 30-mile wide body of water reaching from the Gulf of Alaska, all the way to Anchorage.

Ninilchik, indicated by "*", is 44 miles north of Homer, AK on Cook Inlet.

What brought me here? Well, the fish of course. I'm working on the 32-foot aluminum-hull charter boat, the Voyageur. We take 6-8 clients out once or twice a day for, yep, you guessed it, halibut.

The days are long, the pay is good and I'm eating all the fresh fish and clams I could ever want. I'm living in a retro, but cozy trailer and I drive a beater '89 Buick that's painted orange camouflage and cost me $800.

This place is a seaman's, fisherman's, hunter's, clammer's, biologist's, hydrologist's, geologist's and ecologist's paradise. Thirty-foot tidal swings reveal hectares of seafloor ripe for exploring or digging up clams.

Even the view from the highway is spectacular

Mounds of coal and kelp line the waterline. Boulders as large as houses are revealed and disappear in just a couple hours of changing tides. Endless summer daylight has turned a cold-burned wasteland into a lush rainforest in just a month.

For the first time in my life I have witnessed a true spring season. Unlike Florida, which seems to undergo such gradual alterations in floral and faunal activity, the Kenai Peninsula has undergone a complete metamorphosis between May and June. Once budless, trees now form a canopy of green, dense enough to block out light from above. Bare ground has given was to fields of dandelions, purple lupine flowers, pink fireweed and green cow parsnip bushes.

Now back to the fish. We're fishing in Cook Inlet, a huge finger of water that slices into the state and is surrounded by steep cliffs on the east and a mountain range complete with steaming volcanoes to the west. (It's part of the Ring of Fire, ahem.) We generally fish between 100 and 300 feet of water over flat, gravel bottom. The bottom of the inlet is mostly flat as a result of eons of flushing and scouring tides, similar to a river or creek bottom. We use heavy conventional tackle and 4- to 5-pound lead sinkers to put 18/0 circle hooks on the bottom. Like our flounder in Florida, the 'buts congregate around areas of dense food. Their favorite, the candlefish or eulachon, is a 4- to 6-inch long smelt, that when dried, can burn like a wick due to its high fat content. (Editors note: this oil was also used by coastal Alaskan natives to make their hair shiny and oh so sexy).

According to locals, the size of the average halibut has decreased quite a bit in

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recent years. An average-sized fish is 15 pounds, but we've been catching many more fish smaller than that. Many are blaming commercial longliners which can literally stretch lines the width of the inlet and take many large fish. My captain claims that 5 years ago they would catch a fish over 100 pounds on every trip. However, thus far we have only caught 2 fish over 100 pounds, in two months of fishing every day.

Something else is ailing the halibut as well. Malnutrition. A good portion of our catch sometimes is what we call "milky" or "mushy" halibut. When filleted, these fish have opaque, flaccid muscle that really isn't appetizing. I've cooked it up and it just falls apart and doesn't have that nice, firm texture you'd expect in fresh fish. It's not dangerous to eat, but it's just plain yucky. You can read more about it at Alaska's Department of Fish and Game website*. Scientists are saying it's the lack of fatty fish protein in the fishes' diets. I can attest to that—I've filleted countless fish in the past months with stomachs full of small stone crabs and larger spider crabs.

Actually working on a charter fishing boat has been quite an adventure on its own. Teaching people how to fish every day—oftentimes from scratch—can be rewarding and fun or frustrating and wearisome. I give a demonstration before the fishing begins—and this is rarely enough instruction. I've noticed that women catch the bigger fish because they'll listen to advice. The macho male fisherman, know-it-all type tends to set the hook with a circle hook (a no-no, of course) and often won't give a fish enough time to eat the bait. But heck, that's just an unscientific observation.

We catch a few other kinds of fish, but the diversity of catch isn't high due to the uniformity of the Cook Inlet habitat we're fishing. Pacific cod (also called grey cod), big skates (yes they are up to 6 feet across) , red Irish lords, arrowtooth flounder and some king-size sculpins such as the cabezon make up the rest of our catch.

The arrowtooth is a crazy flatfish. If you've never seen one, imagine a 5-pound flounder with teeth like a Spanish mackerel. Yowza!

Arrowtooth flounder, NOAA Alaska Fisheries Science Center

Despite its genetic similarity, grey cod is not the delectable "fish and chips" species found in the Atlantic. The meat on these cod is mushy and they are often infested with brown, spiraled worms. Fillets are "candelled" on a light table in processing plants to remove these parasites. No thanks.

Well, that's my fish tale for now. I'll be here until mid-August when I must return to the fungus-climate of my home state. Looking forward to pulling nets with the FWC in the Indian River Lagoon, catching some waves and diving off Sebastian. Oh yeah, and getting out of these Xtra Tuff boots and into a pair of flip flops.

-Matt Badolato

http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/static/species/disease/pdfs/fishdiseases/mushy_halibut_syndrome.pdf

Matt is the Past President of the Florida Chapter Student Sub-Unit)

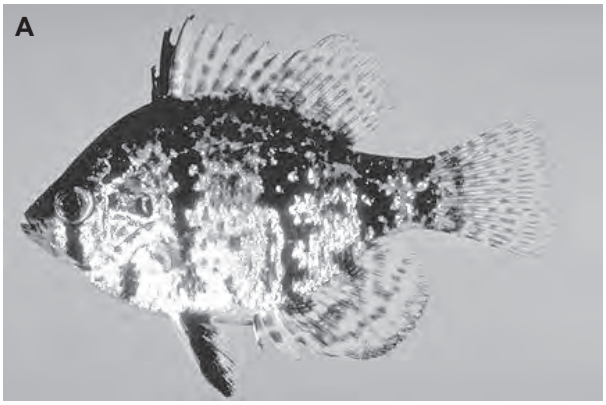
Answers to Page 5.Florida Fishes A. blackbanded sunfish, B. rainwater killifish, C. leatherjack

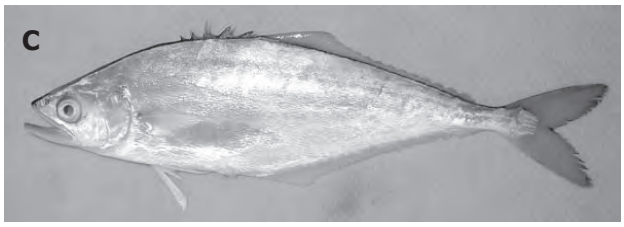
A Note from the Editor

Many thanks to Mr. Kevin Johnson of FFWC, who has so capably served as Editor of The Shellcracker newsletter for the past three years. Additionally, I would like to thank those who have taken the time to contribute articles to educate and keep us all in touch with the on-going activities of the members of the FLAFS. Please keep those submissions and ideas coming.

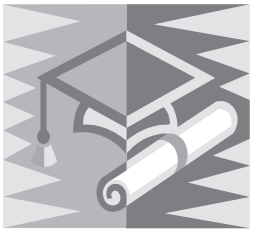
Name That Florida Fish!

(Answers bottom of page 4)





University of Florida Online Master of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences (MFAS)



Starting in the Fall of 2012, a new online Master of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences will be offered by the UF Program of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences in the School of Forest Resources and Conservation. This program is designed for working professionals in fisheries, aquatic sciences, fish health, aquaculture, environmental sciences, and other natural resource fields who are interested in advancing their careers by earning a graduate degree. The ability to take this degree program entirely online means that students do not have to sacrifice their commitments to career and family in order to earn an advanced degree. Students entering this program will come from a variety of backgrounds, including state and federal fisheries agencies and NGOs, as well as journalism, public education and relations, resource interpretation, environmental law and other non-science disciplines. Requirements for the degree are met by completing a schedule of online courses and writing a technical paper in an appropriate topical area approved by the student's Supervisory Committee; a research thesis is <u>not</u> required for the MFAS.

For more information, please visit our website at: www.sfrc.ufl.edu/distance_ed/MFAS, or contact Dr. Debra Murie, Online MFAS Coordinator at dmurie@ufl.edu or (352)-273-3601.