

Snook in the Spotlight

Don't miss the evening show on the coastal waterways.



Patterns which resemble shrimp (below) are great for fishing lighted docks for snook, bottom.



BY HUNTER BACH

Snook can be targeted in a number of scenarios. Arguably the most action-packed are the lighted docks where these fish frequently gather in the canals and channels of central and southern Florida. With moving current, anglers who are cunning and cautious can sift out the best fish from a dock while keeping it producing.

LOCATE AND INFILTRATE

Wait almost an hour after sundown to let the fish fully stage up on the lights. Some fish may have been there all day, but it can be surprising what else will show up, especially when a boat isn't guarding the dock. Spots close to inlets and known snook spawning areas are often best during the summer. When approaching a likely stretch, look for fish feeding and shrimp flicking or baitfish breaking the surface. When bait is getting flushed along by the current and snook are in the area, it is relatively obvious which dock is their favorite.

Fly fishing is the ideal way to approach these fish, and the best



tactic is casting upcurrent. Approach in your vessel from down current and watch for fish holding on the perimeter of the light to keep from spooking them into others. At this stage, you can often see the fish holding in the light, however it's best to wait for ideal opportunities. Position your vessel so that you can anchor or stake off within range of your targets, potentially working from the end of the dock inward over time. Being anchored keeps the snook a little more relaxed than a vessel constantly adjusting.

Resist immediately slinging in

a cast. Moments when a fish chases a bait away from the dock, or when numerous fish are popping, only happen when the fish are feeling relaxed and safe—and those are the times when they are more apt to eat a fly. With trolling motors, try to maintain a constant speed, as switching the vibration of the prop's frequency can alert fish.

SELECTION AND PRESENTATION

Casting up current, it's best to place your presentation ahead of a fish and past them. On more

aggressive fish, you can get them to chase down a fly that lands ahead of them and is stripped away, but they're laid up under that dock for the easy feeding, and a presentation that sweeps across their dinner plate is more likely to disappear in a bubbly explosion. Snook respond to flies with cat-like attention: interested for a moment, but completely indifferent if it gets too good of a look. Selecting an individual fish can increase your chances by allowing you to gauge its reaction and respond in your retrieve.

One of the keys to optimizing your dock game is to switch up presentations. Often, when it seems the fish have shut down, a fly change can provoke a reaction, so having a stocked bag of goodies can result in more and larger fish without having to relocate.

When selecting flies, note what the snook are feeding on: typically shrimp, mullet and pilchards. Keep

your variations minimal so that the fish still recognize their prey species but not your lure. For example switching from a tan-and-brown gurgler (surface fly), to a like-colored Clouser minnow (sub-surface fly) can make all the difference.

Keep the patterns small; despite the

noise snook make while feeding under dock lights, their prey are usually very subtle. In dirtier water, it seems darker colors that have a sharper contrast in the light fare better, and for the more transparent waters, natural, earthy tones will prove more worthy in the eye of a snook.

UNINVITED GUESTS

In most places, dolphin prove to be far more formidable competitors than other people. To cut down the number of times a dolphin shakes down your dock, keep all splashing to a minimal. A thrashing fish, or a small specimen tossed back in the water can bring a dolphin from 100 yards in no time. Subduing fish quickly, with proper tackle, can keep you from having a dolphin follow you from dock to dock. Take your time releasing fish, allowing them to swim off quietly and with a hope of evading the tax man. This also allows for the fish on the dock to settle down before seeing another fly. **FS**