Redfish … a worthy adventure !

James Page II

My first saltwater fish on the fly





Why I like them …

- They have a wide geographical range and are reachable by car.
- You don’t have to necessarily run in large open water to find them, you can use any type of water craft or wade.
- You can use a variety of fly rod wgts and flies for them.
- Depending on location, you can make very short casts and they aren’t leader shy … great option for less experienced fly anglers
- They are strong fighters, and will feed with reckless abandon.
- In the pre-adult stage they relate to structure, current, and bait. When mature they join offshore schools and move significant distances.
- Smaller redfish (18 to 22 inches) make excellent table fare.



Basic Facts about Redfish

- Sciaenops ocellatus is also known as red drum, channel bass, redfish, puppy drum, spot tail bass, bull red or red.
- Found in the Atlantic Ocean and Gulf of America from northern Mexico to Massachusetts.
- Going to focus on the most common range where redfish are targeted: which is Texas through Florida in the Gulf of America, and Florida through Virginia in the Atlantic Ocean.
- Broadcast spawn in groups late summer and fall, varies by location. They spawn in passes, lower parts of estuaries, and nearshore coastal areas depending on location.
- Females can lay over 2 million eggs with the optimum salinity of 30 ppt and optimum water temperature 77 degrees
- On average, redfish mature around three to four years of age staying in estuarine habitats. Once they reach maturity they move to deeper adult habitat offshore large breeding schools, except Indian River/Bannana River of central Florida.

Prey sources

What I have caught them on, they have a large inferior (sub-terminal mouth)

- Shrimp (live and fresh dead)
- Crabs (blue and fiddler)
- Live American Eel (12 to 14 inches long)
- Mullet strips
- Live Mummichog (Mud minnows)
- Live Pinfish
- Dead whole Sardines (6 to 8 inches long)
- Squid
- Variety of artificial baits











Equipment for Reds



- 4 wgt through 11 wgt fly rod, 7 to 10 feet in length depending on location and size of fish … material is your choice (glass/graphite/bamboo)
- WF Floating line or some type of sinking line (full sink, intermediate sink or sink tip)
- 4 to 12 foot leaders - depending on location
- 12lb to 20 lb tippet, 40 lb bite tippet in some locations
- Solid reel that will hold 75 yards of backing for fish under 24 inches, 150 yards of backing for fish over 24 inches.
- There is always a chance to hook a large saltwater gamefish in southern ranges, a good drag never hurts
- Remember, many decades ago fly anglers caught redfish on bamboo and fiberglass rods with click drag reels



Flies for Reds

- Streamer Patterns (Clousers, H&H, Whistlers)
- Seaducers
- Crab Patterns
- Shrimp Patterns
- Bunny Strip streamers
- Spoon Patterns
- Baitfish patterns (Deceivers/EP minnows)
- Top Water patterns
- Colors - combinations of chartreuse/white, black/purple, brown/ginger/cinnamon/tan, olive/tan, blue/olive, yellow/white/grizzly … depends on forage and water color







When on a feed, redfish will eat just about eat anything that fits in their mouth

Wading equipment

- Decent wading shoes
- Long wading pants
- Stripping basket
- Metal or wood wading staff
- Pliers/forceps
- Waders in winter months
- Sling/backpack/lumbar pack
- Stingray guards
- Hook sharpener
- Hook remover













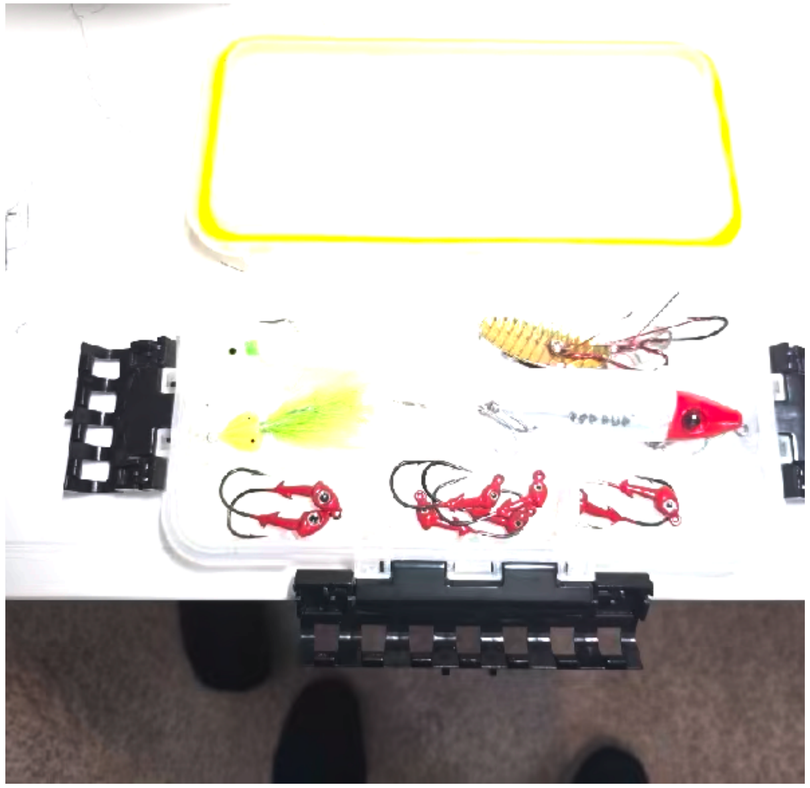
Plan B - Equipment

Just in case

- Finding the Redfish can be harder than catching them. If there is adverse weather conditions this can make the finding them even more challenging.
- If fishing a new area I bring a 3 piece 7 foot med/med heavy spinning/casting rod with appropriate reel.(fits in the same tube/case as a 4 piece 9 foot fly rod)
- I usually fish 15 to 20lb braid on this with 20 to 25 pound fluorocarbon leader
- In a small waterproof box, I will take a few jig/jig heads, a spoon fly, and maybe a top water.
- Instead of trying to find a bait shop, you can stop at most grocery stores and pick up a few uncooked shrimp. Keep them on ice and pinch off a segment or two to tip your jigs with. Shrimp flavored Fish Bites also work well as a bait to tip your jigs.



Spinning rod 3 piece

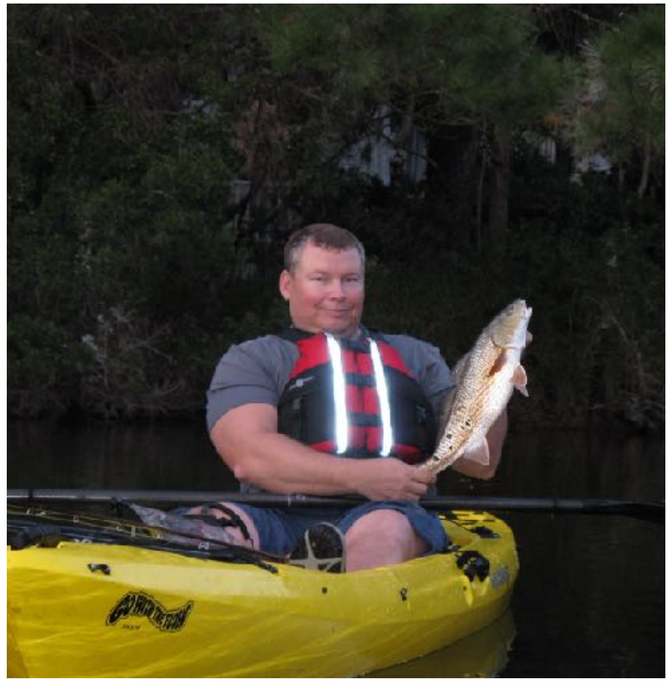


My Favorite Redfish Locations

Destination (pay for travel, lodging and guide)

- Louisiana - anywhere in the state
- Florida - Apalachicola area, Everglades including 10,000 islands
- Texas - Rockport area







Redfish Locations

If you are going for another reason, take a rod just in case

- Texas - entire coast, Galveston area can have water quality issues
- Florida - rest of state, crowded with water quality issues
- South Carolina - entire coast line, crowded around Charleston
- Georgia - challenging to fly fish, large tides and poor water visibility
- Alabama - entire coast line, can have water quality issues on the eastern part, limited fly fishing guides available
- Mississippi - entire coastline does have occasional red tides, limited fly fishing guides available
- North Carolina - inner and outer banks, limited fly fishing guides available







Louisiana

Best Redfishing in the Country



- I have fished the areas around Venice, Hopedale, Grand Isle, Port Fourchon, and Myrtle Grove
- The further you are from the open Gulf the smaller the redfish tend to run on average. (Exception of winter)
- For all practical purposes no wadable areas, bottom is to soft and to many large wild gators (2 plus million in LA, 1 plus million in FL)
- The fishable marsh area is so vast it has created mostly un-pressured fish, you can put the fly right on their head with a very short heavy leader
- In the summer in the areas further from the gulf you can drop down to a 6 wgt, closer to the gulf an 8 or 9 wgt year round is best. You can use a leader from 4 to 9 feet in length, minimum of 20lb tippet.
- Even if you have your own boat, best to use a guide. Many underwater obstacles that will take your lower unit off the boat.



Critters that can give you an ouchy

- Reptiles - Alligators, American Crocodiles, Rattlesnakes, Cottonmouth Water Moccasin, Coral Snakes, Copperheads, Burmese Pythons, African Pythons, Green Anaconda

- Fish - Sharks (Bull, Lemon, Black Tip, Spinner, Bonnethead) stingrays, Catfish (Gafftopsail & Hardhead), Jellyfish

- Remember 20 people died last year from domestic cattle incidents, while only 4 people died from combined shark/alligator incidents









Critters that can give you an ouchy

- Mammals - black bears, Florida panthers, coyotes, manatees, native and feral wild hogs

- Insects - black/brown/red widow spiders, brown recluse spiders, scorpions, wolf/wandering spiders, fire ants, centipedes, millipedes, blister beetles, assassin bugs, caterpillars, cane toads, mosquitoes, horse/deer/ black flies, sand gnats, and ticks.









Helpful books

- Fly-fishing for Redfish, Chico Fernandez, 2015
- Fly Fisherman’s Guide to Saltwater Prey, Aaron J. Adams, Ph.D., 2008
- Redfish on the Fly A Comprehensive Guide, Captain John Kumiski, 2007
- Fishing Florida by Paddle, An Anglers Guide, Captain John Kumiski, 2019
- Saltwater Fly Fishing, Joe Brooks, 1950
- Camping and Cruising in Florida, James A. Henshall MD, 1884







Images of the Cracker Streamer developed by Dr George Trowbridge in 1888

Questions and Thank you !

