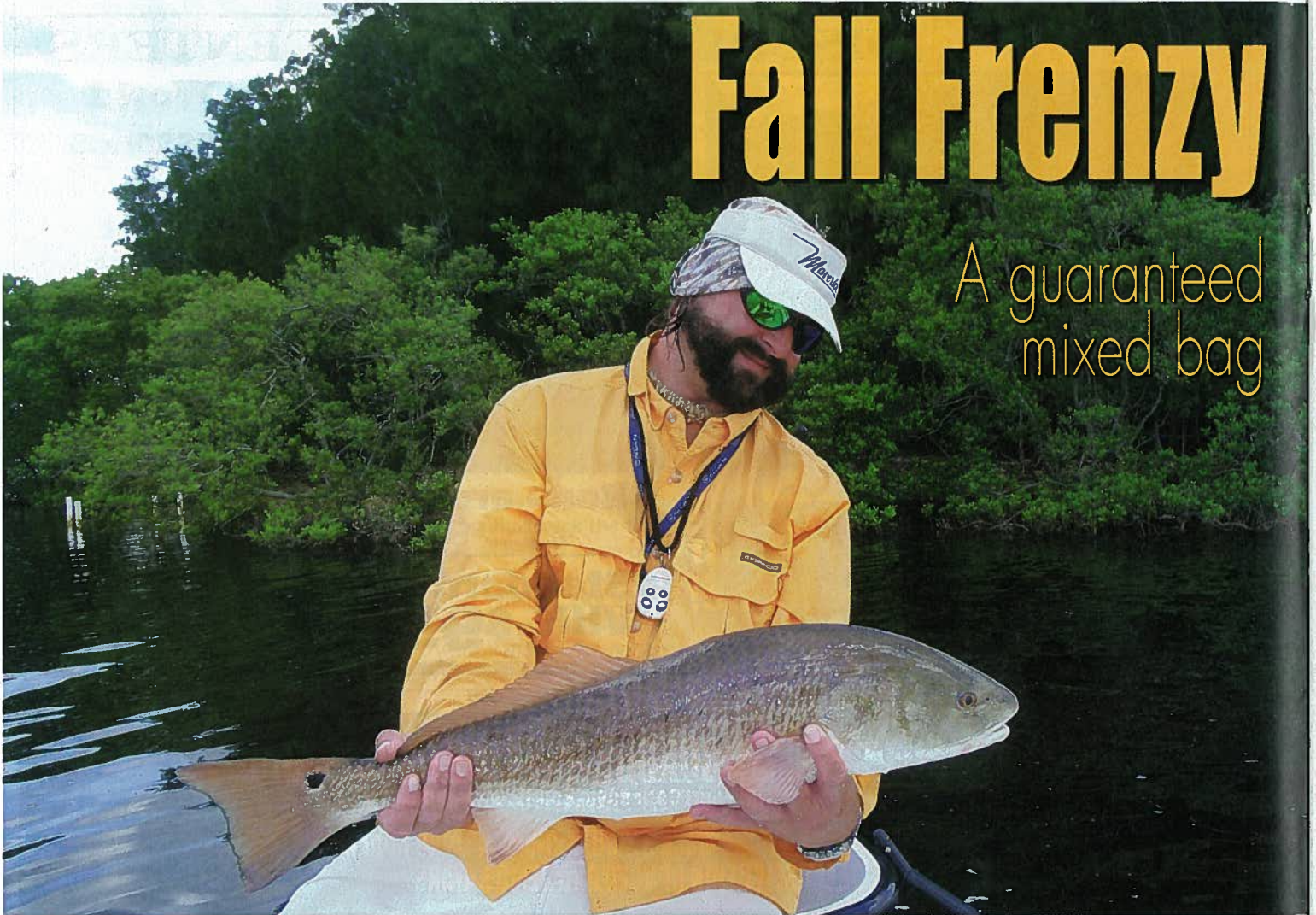


## Fall Frenzy

A guaranteed mixed bag



**A**utumn on the West Central Gulf Coast of Florida may be the very best time of year to go out and catch more types of fish in one day than in any other season. If you're a catch-and-release kind of angler, fall alone can provide all the different kinds of rod-bending excitement you hope to find all throughout the year. If you're the type of fisherman who likes to fill the cooler, this is also perhaps the best time of year to head back to the dock with plenty of different fish to hit the filet table.



With the approach of the autumn months come a few key changes to our waters. First, the water temperature finally begins to cool from those intense dog days of summer when water temps range from the mid 80s to the low 90s. This cooling of water temperature begins a seasonal migration of fish moving north to south that brings with it a greater percentage of hook ups of all kinds. We now see water temps in the low 70s to high 70s range and migrating fish like kingfish and tarpon will be heading down to warmer destinations. More importantly, for us, they will be fattening up for the winter so eating as much as possible is a high priority. Hungry fish means happy anglers!

One of the most targeted fall time fish migrations are spanish and, especially, king mackerel. These two fish of the same family are right now ripping through our nearshore passes, along the beaches and over offshore reefs. Tried and true methods of catching both are the good old anchor up and chum block over the side. Free-line just about any type of live bait and it won't take long for either fish to slice and dice its way to your hook. Remember to use heavier than usual monofilament leader and long shank hooks to avoid break offs from these toothy speedsters. Wire leader is also effective but definitely deters the bite.

In addition to the seasonal mackerel run, game fish of all sorts start to invade the grass flats that during the heat of summer were mostly barren except for the cooler, early morning hours. Snook will begin to leave the cool, deep swash channels of the beaches and stage up around spoil islands and their mangrove covered haunts. Redfish will continue to move around in decent size schools all around the flats with some very big fish mixed in. Seatrout will also begin their annual return to shallower grass flats that, by winter, will eventually be the hotspot for this species. Look for some of the biggest trout of the year being caught during the late part of the fall in mid to shallow depths over the grass and on the bottom of sandy potholes.

One of my particular favorites that comes alive during October and November is the delicious mangrove snapper. "Mangos" as they're called by many locals, can be tricky fish to get to the boat. If targeting them inshore either around deep docks, bridge pilings or other structure, they'll as quickly break you off on that structure as they did inhale your



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bait. Like sheepshead, they are also notorious bait stealers. My advice is to either use a circle hook which helps to solve this problem by setting itself, or, develop a trigger-like reflex to set the hook if using j-hooks. They are super fast fish when the bite and will often leave you baitless. However, this is the perfect time of year to find a pile of them inshore if you find the right structure. Be sure to map out exposed structure at dead low tides in order to return to those same spots on flooded tides to find these tasty snapper.

Don't be surprised to see the bite continue from some of our other summer/fall species such as: sharks, flounder, pompano, black drum, and as always, our favorite de-hooker catches - jacks, ladyfish and catfish.

Unfortunately, the end of autumn also means the disappearing act of scaled sardines, aka: whitebait. Though the bait can still be found in deeper water around bridges and in the passes, by around late November it can be tough to impossible to fill your livewell with that precious live bait that inshore fisherman so cherish. Many turn to buying live shrimp or fish with artificials as fall turns into winter. Shrimp can definitely be effective and catch some very nice fish, but, very often fall victim to piranha-like packs of pinfish, leaving you with a dead, legless bait. To me, this is the perfect time of year to pull out those special artificials you've been seeing advertised all year. You know, those pretty, as-close-to-the-real-thing plugs, imitation shrimp and baitfish that have been sitting in their plastic packages just waiting to plop down next to a mangrove shoreline.

So, don't wait another second... because besides the springtime, this is as good as it gets! Better yet, with those cool breezes steadily blowing our way all day while on the water, you might not even break a sweat!

# Go Deep!



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