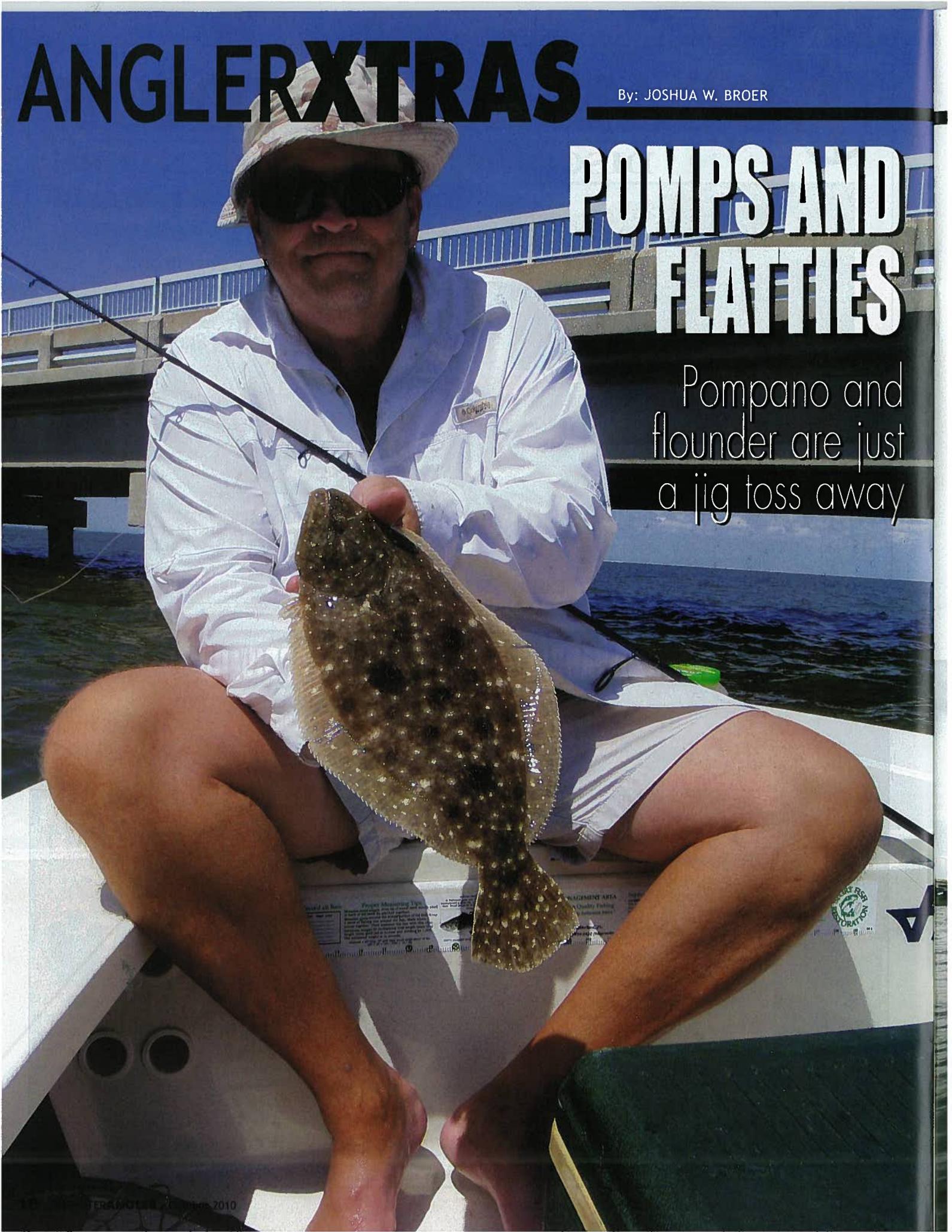


# ANGLER XTRAS

By: JOSHUA W. BROER

## POMPS AND FLATTIES

Pompano and flounder are just a jig toss away



I think it's safe to say that most hardcore inshore anglers on our West Central Gulf Coast primarily target "the big three" - snook, redfish and trout. All three of those game fish provide great action and can't be beat on the dinner table. Well, actually, I retract that. They CAN be beat on the dinner table and two fish which are arguably better table fare, pompano and flounder.

They are, however, tricky little guys to get into the cooler. They simply do not cover as much water as our better known and more often targeted game fish. And not only is locating them tough, knowing what lure or bait to use and when to use them is something that only time on the water and patience, MUCH patience, will achieve.

Our east coast neighbors see these fish in bigger numbers and certainly, when it comes to flounder in any case (aka "flatties"), they find them considerably larger in size. Traditional east coast flounder baits include just about anything you can get to stay on the bottom, whether live bait or artificial lures. Many of the really huge flounder they catch there, called "doormats", come from the fishing

piers that stretch far out into the Atlantic Ocean.

In terms of pompano fishing on the east coast, the tried and true method there is beach/surf fishing with sand fleas which are dug up right at the foot of the surf. It's not uncommon to see surf fishermen with their poles staked in the sand all day, making sure to catch their limit of pompano.

Why the dedication to these fish? Pompano, most agree, are among the best tasting fish in the ocean. They have a sweet, melt in your mouth kind of taste and are very expensive at fish markets. So, these "golden nuggets" as they are rightfully termed, are a prized and heavily targeted fish on the other coast.

But what about our own local west coast waters? How often do you here your buddy say, "Yeah, we're headin' out early tomorrow to put a hurtin' on the flounder!" Not often. Pompano, actually, are targeted a little more thoroughly by some of our own local anglers. It's still a rather small population of anglers though who put any time into locating these fish.

That's because it's not easy. If putting these fish in the boat was like catching

one trout after another on the grass flats in the winter time, there would be nothing too special about these two species.

These fish, unlike our sea grass loving trout, for example, are more often found on a mix of sand and shell bottom and around structure. Flounder are found almost always buried in the sand, much like a stingray, camouflaged and waiting to ambush unsuspecting baitfish. They are sometimes caught on the grass flats as a by-catch but most often lurk on bottoms that range from sandy to a mixture of sandy and rocky bottom.

They'll eat just about anything, however, they seem to especially love anything that wiggles. Thus, a squiggly-tailed jig and jig head are definite go-to lures when looking for these fish. Find some structure: oyster bars, sand bars, rocky jetties, bridge pilings, etc., and you might just find these hard to locate bottom dwellers. Keep your jig on the bottom at all times and keep your presentation slow. And, keep your fingers crossed! This ain't easy fishing.

The same holds true for the coveted pompano. We actually have a more prolific pompano fishery going on here in the



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Tampa Bay area than many may know about. It is though, as mentioned before, carried out by only a very few dedicated and skilled anglers who, despite their home-grown knowledge, still get skunked from time to time.

Like flounder, pompano seem to love jigs and lures that wiggle and move erratically through the water. Most bait and tackle stores sell artificials that are designed specifically for fishing pomps.

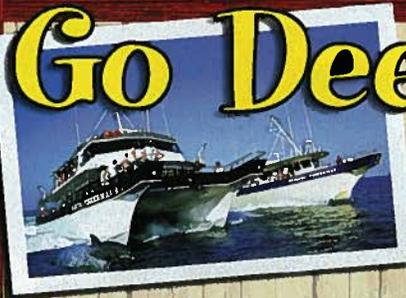
Perhaps one of our more well-known and amazingly talented pompano fishermen, Lee (aka aquaholik, as known on local fishing forums), has this fishery dialed in better than anyone I know. Really though, it's all about time on the water. As little as I target pompano, I nevertheless see him on the pump hunt almost every time I'm out there. His boat is small and not too sophisticated but was custom-built by his brother just for the type of fishing he does. And although he targets different fish during different seasons, there is no doubt that he is best known for his expertise in catching pompano.

Flounder too. On a recent trip in the upper part of Tampa Bay, Lee and his brother managed to hook and land a 25 inch flounder. This "doormat" barely fit in his net and was his personal best to date. It is definitely the biggest flounder I have ever seen caught in our particular region and likely ranks among the biggest ever landed on our entire West Central Gulf Coast.

To keep a flattie, it must measure at least 12 inches and the daily bag limit is 10 per angler. There is no closed season for flounder.

It has been over a year since I've limited out on pompano. To keep one, it must measure not less than 11 inches and not more than 20 inches at the fork. The daily bag limit is six per angler.

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