

Posted on Sun, Jun. 14, 2009

Dolphins' Parcels is not only tuna in town

By Susan Cocking

It's tuna time in South Florida, but probably not for too much longer.

If you can sneak off from work a bit early and will those late-afternoon lightning storms to hold off for a few hours, you have an excellent chance of scooping up some sushi entrees.

"They're very wary," Nel Martinez, owner/captain of the Crandon Marina-based charter boat Top Gun said. "The tunas feed right before dark. It gets good right when the sun is going down."



Not only that, but low light helps obscure the leader attached to your fishing line that might scare an alert tuna away. And while you're pursuing the bevy of blackfins and the occasional yellowfin, you also can pick up kingfish, sailfish, wahoo and dolphin. To take advantage of the late tuna bite, Martinez and several other local charter captains offer five-hour, half-day trips from 3 p.m. to 8 p.m. On a recent weekday evening trip, Martinez and mate Jorge Diez guided Jules Fabre of Miami to a catch of two blackfins up to 25 pounds, three kingfish, one schoolie dolphin and the chance to jump a sailfish. A very busy several hours, for sure.

The group managed to catch about 10 dozen threadfin herring chumming and fishing with Sabiki rigs at Bug Light. Then Martinez pointed the boat south toward Triumph Reef and spotted a discernible current rip in about 120 feet of water.

Diez deployed two kites using a recent innovation known as the "kite thong" to attach a helium balloon to each one, keeping them aloft in the light wind. Creating a typical sailfish spread, he attached three 20-pound-class fishing lines to each kite with pink 50-pound monofilament leader tied to 6/0 circle hooks. Diez bridled the larger baits -- sewing the hook behind the head -- to achieve solid hook-ups. He finished with two flat lines trailing off the stern.

The first few bites that late afternoon consisted of two small kingfish, a schoolie dolphin and a bonito. But as the sun sank lower and the sea breeze picked up, so did Top Gun's luck.

The fluorescent bobber on the right, long kite line began to heel over, then sail quickly to the north, indicating that something was eating the bait. Fabre grabbed the rod, watched the fishing line drop out of the clip attached to the kite line and then held on as the line first tightened, then began to peel off the reel.

For several long moments, there wasn't much he could do except steady the rod in his fighting belt and wait for the line to stop zinging out.

"Looks like a tuna," Martinez said. ``Looks like he's coming to the boat." The words had barely left the captain's mouth when the left middle bobber began its erratic airborne dance, and the fishing line dropped out of the clip. Now the crew of the Top Gun was fighting two fish at once.



Fabre brought his fish up for Diez to gaff -- a fat blackfin estimated at 25 pounds. Then Fabre's companion boated a second, slightly smaller tuna. "You often get two at once because they're competing for the bait," Martinez said.

After stowing the tunas in the cooler, Diez got to work rebaiting the kite lines. Then he tossed out several handfuls of the smaller threadfins from the livewell. Moments later, Martinez spotted a telltale blue-black dorsal fin slicing the surface around the right middle bait. Then the line dropped sharply out of the clip. Fish on, and this time it was *not* a tuna.

Fabre jumped on the rod as a sailfish emerged, performing a series of sideways half-rolls on the surface before diving beneath the waves. The next time the crew spotted it, the sail was leaping about 25 yards from amidships. Just as quickly, it disappeared. Mystified, Fabre hung onto the rod and gaped in astonishment as the fish cleared the water directly off the stern. He tried to reel, only to find that the line was caught on the running gear beneath the boat. Before anyone could untangle it, the line broke.

Darkness was beginning to absorb the gray-white sky. "Now's when it gets good," Martinez said.

The crew caught one more king about 15 pounds, but no more tunas -- despite emptying the livewells of threadfins. By about 8:30 p.m., it was too dark to see the bobbers on the kite lines, so Martinez called lines out.

There would be sushi on the Crandon Marina dock this night, complete with wasabi and soy sauce.

Said Martinez: ``Even if the tunas weren't here, it's still pretty cool."

**To book a twilight fishing trip on the Top Gun, visit miamifloridafishingcharters.com
or call 305-361-8110.**