



Steve Baker holds a low country red for Tuck Scott. FF Weekly photo by John Kumiski

Beaufort reds offer southern charm

Any tide is the right tide to fly fish for South Carolina's marsh redfish

By John Kumiski
Mosquito Lagoon

A disturbance in the marsh grass about 100 yards away caught my eye. I kept watching the spot. There it was again, so I poled the boat over that way.

Capt. Tuck Scott manned the fly rod. I had blown several shots, so now it was his turn to fish. My "disturbance" turned out to be a tailing red. Scott made one cast, a good one, and the fish struck immediately.

Scott started fishing over twenty years ago, when his grandfather taught him the area around Beaufort, South Carolina.

He now exclusively targets saltwater species including redfish, seatrout, ladyfish, cobia, tarpon, and sheepshead on the fly as well as on light tackle. He works out of Beaufort's Bay Street Outfitters, and shared with me the following information about fishing for redfish in South Carolina's low country.

"Throughout the year we have strong redfishing. They have really responded to the slot limit that was put in place

about five years ago, with both numbers and size of fish increasing significantly. Our approach changes with the seasons, which keeps it interesting all year long," Scott said.

Fifty percent of the inshore marshes in South Carolina are in Beaufort County. That means that inshore anglers have a huge amount of water to fish.

"The fall is the time most people fish for reds here. The fish are really aggressive then because the water gets cooler and a lot of the bait disappears. The fish are used to the easy living of summertime, and when the food thins out they strike flies much more readily," according to Scott.

The water gets the clearest during the winter and receives almost no fishing pressure then, either. The fish school then, so it's actually the best time to sight cast. The water looks like it does in the Keys, but most of the locals put their boats away because they think the fishing is over.

"Our tidal range runs from five and a half feet at the low end to ten foot tides on full or new moons in the spring or fall. In the winter I like low

tides better because the fish are tightly schooled up. In that low water it's easier to find them because there are only a few places they're likely to be. The lower water helps you target them," Scott said.

An incoming tide that's later in the day helps as well because the mud has been warmed by the sun. That warms the water flowing over it and makes the fish more active.

"During the fall the fish work the banks on the middle tides searching for bait. They have to work harder now because there's not nearly as much bait around as there was during the summer," he said.

However, anglers can find fish at any tide this time of year. On higher tides anglers need to know what's under the water, so pay attention at low tides to where live shell reefs are, where white shell reefs are, where eddies along the shorelines are.

"During the winter especially those shoreline eddies over a dark mud bottom, where the current doesn't move much and the water has a chance to warm up several degrees, are very productive.

The shell reefs are always going to attract fish because they are food factories for them. So paying attention at low tide helps when the water comes up," Scott said.

Another technique is useful for finding fish on the tailing tides. Any area that has a good entry and exit point where fish can get up on the flat at one point and get off at a different point is good. They will use flats where they come and go from the same entrance, but there will be more fish if they have several entry/exit points.

These can be a small creek, or even just a little dip at the lip of the flat. They feel safer with as many different exit points as possible, according to Scott.

"I prefer wading when they're doing this. You can't spook them with the boat, and you can get pretty close to them because they're preoccupied. Plus, it's just you and the fish, which is very cool," he added.

In the winter the fish prefer mud bottoms. They want warmer water, especially inside a "hook," an area where the water is pretty stagnant

without much flow.

"A hook is a cut back into the grass with a shell reef out in front, a place where the water can warm up. Otherwise the fish prefer shallow water where they can stay safe from predators, especially dolphin. On tailing tides they like those *Spartina* grass flats that have lots of fiddler crabs. That's their favorite food here," according to Scott.

"My favorite flies include the Dupre Spoonfly and any kind of Electric Chicken fly. Bunny flies with weedguards work real well. Brown Clouser Minnows and Merkins are always good to carry. These fish are not very picky," Scott said.

Beaufort is a lovely Southern town with lots to do besides fishing. There are all kinds of accommodations, but I stayed at the Country Inn at (843) 379-4000. You can reach Tuck at (877) 501-5001, or at www.baystreetoutfitters.com.

Capt. John Kumiski is a fishing guide and author of five books on fishing in Florida waters. You can find out more about John at www.spottedtail.com