

TARPON LURE SHARKS TO BOCA GRANDE PASS

The annual tarpon migration to our area from points south is taking place now and somewhat earlier than normal due to the warm winter and resulting higher than normal water temperatures. And, along with tarpon come hungry sharks!

Gulf water temperature at this time is in the 70's, which is sufficiently warm enough for tarpon to inhabit local waters. While warm water ushers in the large number of tarpon to Boca Grande Pass, it also attracts several species of sharks. Hammerheads and bull sharks love to feed on tarpon and they create added excitement to tarpon season for those visitors who have not had a close encounter with the species other than watching "Jaws" at the movies. By coming to our area to tarpon fish, these visitors can many times witness the raging aggression of a hungry shark after a tarpon.

During recent years, bull sharks have been so prevalent in local waters they traveled in schools. Whether it be a fierce bull shark or a very large hammerhead that looks like a submarine, they both serve up vicious destruction to big tarpon. A large reason for increased shark activity is that many new generation pass fishermen use light tackle with low strength line. This makes the fight much longer and results in a tarpon at the end of the lengthy fight being completely exhausted and easy prey for a hungry shark.

For decades, traditional tarpon fishing at Boca Grande Pass has included 80 pound test Dacron line used in conjunction with equally strong rods, reels, leader and big game hooks. This has been standard equipment and still is today for members of the Boca Grande Fishing Guides Association (BGFGA). The result has always been a much shorter fight and a quick release of the fish without wearing it out. Under such conditions, released tarpon are not such easy prey to the sharks due to their ability to speedily get away from danger.

Sharks are a nuisance to tarpon guides, although the sight of one chasing a hooked fish is plenty exciting. The sight of the shark's dorsal fin protruding two or three feet above the water, accompanied by the large ominous dark shadow just beneath the surface that is attached to that dorsal fin, will get your attention, to say the least! The sight of a tarpon, well over a hundred pounds, that suddenly becomes engulfed to the head in a single bite from a hungry charging shark and leaving only a shredded reminder of what was just seconds before a very powerful game fish, is absolutely unforgettable.

However, shark fishing is not what we are about during tarpon season. Although there are some clients who specifically hire guides to fish for sharks, the reason for fishing at Boca Grande during April through July primarily involves the world famous tarpon population we are so lucky to experience.

For those who haven't scheduled their 2008 tarpon charter yet, visit the Boca Grande Fishing Guides Association web site at www.bocagrandefishing.com for a complete list of local, professional tarpon experts, plus other interesting information about Boca

Grande and the association. Also, neat facts about Boca Grande tarpon fishing and contact information for member guides can be found in the association's well known pamphlet, "Tarpon Fishing & Boat Operation at Boca Grande". The 2008 edition is now available and can be found at Whidden's Marina, the Boca Grande Chamber of Commerce and various island businesses.