

Life's Short: Fish Hard

By Billy Barton

Special to Water LIFE

'Sup guys? My name is Billy Barton, I was born in Port Charlotte and raised by my dad to be a fishaholic. Thanks dad! I guess there's worse things I could be. I love being a Floridian! I wouldn't give it up for the world. I love this weather, I love the sun, I love the beaches, I love the Charlotte Harbor, I love the Gulf of Mexico, and I love fishing. Fishing to me is more of an obsession. I know quite a few of you readers are in the same boat. Well if you guys are reading this, then you probably love fishing too. And if you love fishing as much as me (which is doubtful) then you know last month was just one heck of a month to be out on the water.

The month of June always seems to produce. I only got out on one good offshore mission in June, but we caught fish and we saw some crazy stuff out there.

We spent the daytime hours trolling stretch 25s and 30s. We caught a couple legal size kings and some bonitas about 5- to 8-miles out of Boca Grande. Then we ran offshore and trolled around the sinkhole where we caught a few decent size amberjacks. We stopped and threw some tube-baits on some big 'cudas.

You know they say you never know



what you're going to see out there. Well this was defiantly one of those trips. Out there at that sinkhole there was a grand daddy loggerhead sea turtle. I mean he was BIG. Over 500 pounds (probably) with barnacles all over his back - the whole nine yards. He surfaced right next to the boat and right behind him was what



was really so amazing. About a 15 foot tiger shark. Gray with white stripes probably a thousand pound fish surfaced and did two full circles around the turtle then went back down. We almost saw one heck of a national geographic moment right next to the boat! This was pretty amazing. I was just seconds too late with the camera. Oh well, my mind won't forget that one, that's for sure.

We ran inshore as the sun set and posted up on one of our favorite snapper holes for the full moon about 25 miles out and began chumming. By about 2 a.m. we had enough. We caught three keeper gag grouper all 6 to 10 pounds and 7 nice mangrove in the 4 to 8 pound range. We also caught several big amberjacks and got horsed by some goliath groupers. That's a recipe for not getting out of bed the next day. I'm talking about IB pro-fen for breakfast!

That brings me to inshore. Yes - aha - inshore. Not quite as painful on the back and still lots and lots of fun. There's still some big Spanish mackerel around the markers in the harbor and out towards the pass. Look for the schools of threadfins and you should find the macks. We had some good fun in like 6 foot of water out in front of Burnt Store on the flats. I threw the net on some thread fins, we anchored up, I cut some of em up and chummed a little bit. We fished for probably two hours and caught about 15 small black tips on light tackle. This was a lot of fun and the drags were singing - that's the main objective. Also the cobia bite was pretty good last month. I think we got 7 to the boat one week. Only one of em was a

keeper, still a heck of a lot of fun. That reminds me I need to give a shout out to my little brother Matt Barton on that one. He is only 14 years old and he was also raised to be a fishaholic. Congratulations Matt on your first Cobia (photo right) and your first keeper Cobia to boot. Matt caught the only keeper of the week and he did it on light tackle. Matt fishes with a 8 to 17 pound class All Star spinning rod with a Quantum Catalyst 20. He landed his 34 inch, 10 pound cobia on 15 pound braid with a 25 pound fluorocarbon leader after a 15 minute battle. Good job Matt!

Truthfully my heart is probably on the flats and under the bushes. The whitebait is just all over the place. The east wall near



Pirate Harbor has had some nice bait and Jug Creek Shoal also. The reds and snook are feeding on it heavily so it's real important that you get enough to chum with. These chummers will get the fish going under the bushes and let em know it's time to eat. The high summertime tides



can make it hard to catch the fish when they are way up under the bushes. I will throw the bait up in the bushes and if there's fish under there it will get em moving around a little bit. If you wanna' go tare up some big summertime reds and snook guess what? It's summer now!

I want to end with my feelings on the oil. I know everybody probably has about the same feelings about the situation in the Gulf. Matter of fact you're all probably sick of it period. But I'm going to say it anyways. Man this sucks! This is such a serious problem and I never in my wildest nightmares ever pictured anything like this happening in my lifetime. It really gives me a sick feeling in my stomach when I think about it.

My heart goes out to the people whose lives have been ruined by this catastrophe. I don't know what I would do if I was in your shoes. I am sorry. I am sorry for us all. I am sorry for everyone who loves the water and lives the salt life. And I'm sorry all we can do now is hope and pray.



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