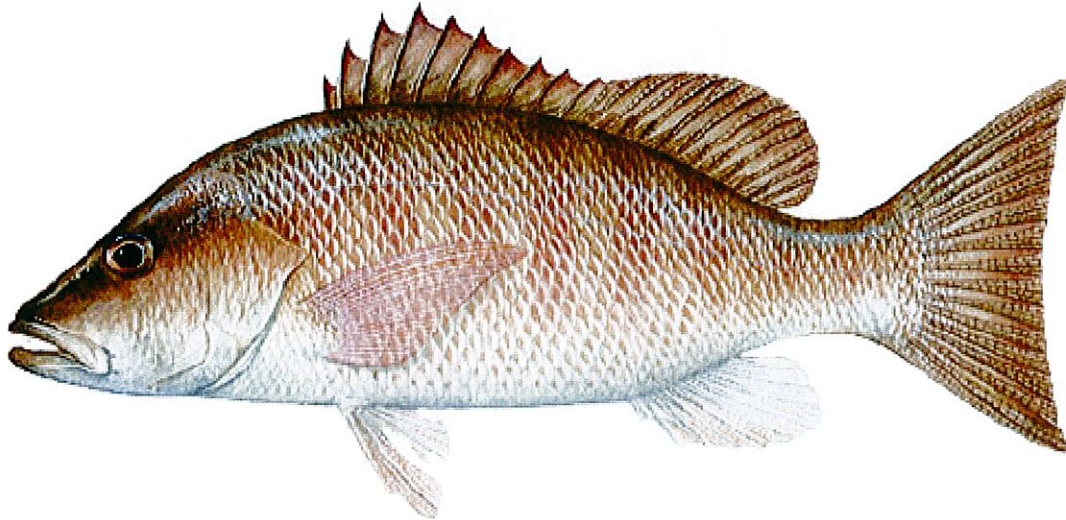


**AUGUST'S BEST BET
SEBASTIAN INLET STATE PARK**



MANGROVE SNAPPER
(*Lutjanus griseus*)

DESCRIPTION: Usually dark brown or reddish with coppery tones, but with no distinctive pattern, mangrove snapper, sometimes called gray snapper, may exhibit a broad dark stripe from the tip of the snout through the eye towards the fishes' dorsal fin, especially in younger fishes. This fish ranges from Mass., Bermuda, and the northern Gulf of Mexico to SE Brazil. Juveniles are found inshore in tidal creeks, mangroves, and grassbeds while adults are generally found nearshore or offshore near coral or rocky reefs. Offshore catches are common to 10lbs. and the all tackle record caught out of Port Canaveral, Florida weighed 17lbs.

HEIGHT OF SEASON: In the Sebastian Inlet area, mangrove snapper are prevalent from early summer through early fall, with peak months of activity occurring in July and August. Rough water conditions can produce some decent snapper fishing as late as November and December.

RULES AND REGULATIONS: Mangrove snapper must have a minimum length of 10 inches in order to be kept. There is a daily bag limit of 5 (five) fish per individual. Keep up to date on changing rules and regulations. You will need a saltwater fishing license.

BAITS: Inlet mangrove snapper prefer live baits. Small fish such as mojarras, pilchards, thread herring, and pinfish make excellent snapper baits. Live shrimp are also a good bait for snappers but many other inlet fish, such as rockfish and pinfish, can decimate a nice live shrimp before a snapper can find it. As the season progresses and the finger mullet run gets underway, small mullets can become a great snapper bait also. Mangrove snapper are seldom caught on dead and artificial baits, especially near inshore waters.

TACKLE: The live baits needed to catch inlet mangrove snapper are best presented on a sliding sinker rig. About 12-14 inches of 20-30 lb. monofilament tied to a #1 or 1\0 hook is generally all that is needed. A small #7 or #8 swivel secured to the opposite end of the leader will act as a stop for the egg sinker when the leader is tied to your reel's line. If fishing larger or smaller baits, hook size should be adjusted to bait size. Standard saltwater tackle in the 10-20 lb. class is good for catching inlet snapper. For larger fish or when fishing near structure, tackle may have to be stronger.

METHOD: Snapper favor areas of structure in and above the water. It is no surprise that most inlet snapper are caught near the jetty rocks and pilings as well as the bridge areas, L-dock area (by the campground), and by any structure that may line the inside shore of the inlet. Mangrove roots and fallen trees are also known productive spots for mangrove snapper, fish these areas with the correct baits and just enough lead to hold the bottom. When snapper fishing, snags and cutoffs can be an expected part of the quest. If the overall water color in the inlet is extremely clean or clear, seek out areas that may seem a little bit stirred up or off color in order to produce more strikes. Snapper fishing, as well as all fishing in general, can be slow when water conditions become extremely clear and calm.

TIMES AND TIDES: Inlet snapper fishing can vary greatly on a weekly basis when considering times and tides. Fish can be caught in general during any tide or any time but feeding periods do vary from day to day and week to week. The best indicator of what to expect on any given day is generally to look at what happened the day before. This can be checked out at the tackle shop. Early mornings and late afternoons seem to be most consistent times for better catches. Dark hours can sometimes be very productive also.

PREPARATION: I believe the larger snapper, those approaching 2 lbs. or greater, are best filleted. Smaller fish are good prepared as panfish and cooked whole. Snapper is excellent prepared any way fish can be cooked (it is hard to ruin!), and traditional methods of deep frying or oven broiling let the delicious flavor of this fish stand on its own.

ALSO THIS MONTH: Look for fishing trends to change as summer starts to give way to fall. The fall finger mullet run usually begins at Sebastian Inlet in August, sometimes early in the month and sometimes later. The first small schools can usually be spotted in the ocean pocket area of the north jetty, often mixing with the still prevalent schools of pilchards. When this happens, Spanish mackerel, jacks, and tarpon can be added to the summertime catches which have included lookdowns, blue runners, and redfish.

Good luck,

Ranger Ed Perry