



DOUG OLANDER

Guide Nick Sassic (left), angler Gary Jennings and an Indian River red.

MORE OFTEN THAN NOT, WE *FEEL* A STRIKE LONG BEFORE we ever get a look at its source. But in a few fisheries, we see our quarry well before the hook-setting stage — which raises the thrill of fishing to a whole new level. Not much in fishing produces a rush like actually watching a big fish charge up to inhale a lure or bait (nor is there much as frustrating as watching fish decide not to eat). Here, *Sport Fishing's* editors have each picked one of their favorite sight-fishing spots and offer a brief description, along with contact information for anyone wanting to get in on the excitement.

Sensational

Our Editors Share Their Favorite Fisheries for the Ultimate Thrill of Seeing Each Strike



Sight-Casting

Stealth in the shallows: Central Florida redfish.

STEALTH IN THE SHALLOWS: CENTRAL FLORIDA REDFISH

In just about any circumstances, sight-casting offers among sport fishing's most exciting moments. Casting into schools of rapacious predators breezing past a boat for a sure hookup the moment a lure touches down (if not before) is hard to beat. But a very different sort of heart-thumping experience awaits those who



get to fish central Florida's clear, shallow Indian River-Mosquito Lagoon estuary for bull redfish.

These big reds don't come to you; you go to them with utter stealth because, in this sight-fishery, you're working shallow water — often just a foot or two deep.

The predators often reveal themselves, sometimes with their backs sticking clear of the surface, and they seem aware of their vulnerability. Plus they're worked pretty hard: Increasing interest has meant a proliferation of guides and private boaters cruising the flats. Those who enjoy consistent success are very skilled (and/or very lucky) at spotting and stalking these big reds.

The spot: First, you've got to find the fish. Blind-casting may net the odd red and a trout or two, but typically means endless throwing without much result. A poling platform, good polarized lenses and — most of all — experience generally make the difference. But even lacking all these things, the surface wake, set up in calm water by these bronze mini subs weighing 20 to 40 pounds, at times offers a dead giveaway. And of course, when they're feeding actively, you can often see a massive tail or even many waving like so many pink flags.

The stalk: Once fish are spotted, the guide (or you if you're alone, perhaps in a kayak) must move to within casting range without spooking the fish. The slightest thump in the bottom of a boat can at least put a whole school on alert and give them lockjaw; at worst, it may send the fish scurrying off into deeper water. Some guides hunker down low and ask their anglers to do the same to make them less visible.

The cast: When the moment comes, you have to be ready to loft whatever you're offering — and these opportunistic predators will grab surface lures, flies, jigs, spoons, soft plastics and (usually most reliably) big live shrimp or fresh crab chunks. But the cast must be beyond the fish and pulled back on an intercept path; any loud "plop" nearby will give the fish

reason to bolt and your guide reason to consider other professions.

The fight: When you finally do make the hookup, hang on. That's another great aspect of this fishery: the opportunity to battle it out with a redfish longer than your arm in very shallow water. That means there's only one way the fish can go: out!

By any measure, this is truly a world-class sight-fishery for one of the most popular inshore game fish. It's also unique since redfish from the mid-Atlantic through the Gulf normally move offshore when they get into the jumbo-size range, but in this productive, semi-enclosed estuary, they just stay and grow.

Unfortunately, pressure from anglers is growing, but a large stretch of the Banana River has long been closed to any motorized craft, and a fair swath of the Mosquito Lagoon has recently been closed off to everything but poling or trolling motors.

So you can still visit this estuary and have the chance to see occasional aggregations of big redfish that may number in the hundreds, all in clear, knee-deep water. And if that doesn't get your heart thumping, someone needs to check your pulse: You're probably dead.

— **Doug Olander, Editor in Chief**