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Starting in June, rainfall—and hence runoff—is the key to a whole new world of **East Central** light-tackle enjoyment. Runoff flushes gambusia minnows, shiners and small bluegills from creeks, rivers and other tannin-stained backwaters connecting with the Indian River Lagoon system, pulling in snook, small tarpon, redfish, freshwater bass, you name it. No matter where you fish between Daytona Beach and Vero Beach you'll find creeks flowing into the river system from the backcountry.

Gary Giles, a guide and fly fisherman from Palm Bay, makes creek tarpon one of his specialties in Turkey Creek and the Melbourne-Tillman Canal in Palm Bay, Crane Creek and the Eau Gallie River in Melbourne, and Sebastian River on the Brevard-Indian River county line.

"Tarpon in particular are going up these creeks not just for the bait but also for the cooler water found in the runoff," Giles explained. "The smaller fish are zeroing in on small, black minnows," he said, referring to gambusia minnows, also known as mosquito fish, which swarm by the millions in fresh backwaters.

Giles uses all-black fly patterns, particularly one he ties himself.

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"It's nothing more than a 2-inch Clouser Minnow on a No. 1 Mustad tarpon hook. I put a little weight on them by using medium-size barbell eyes."

Giles says he finds tarpon to 60 pounds in the Melbourne Harbor area of Crane Creek in downtown Melbourne, with the best activity occurring at night, preferably after 10 or 11 p.m. when all is quiet.

"I'll ease my boat around the edges of the security lights and the tarpon will be lying in the shadows," he said.

All the docks in the Melbourne Harbor are private, so the only access is by boat. The closest ramp is at Front Street Park just off New Haven Avenue near Harry Goode's Outdoor Shop.

Early May to the end of June can be one of the best times along this part of the east coast for catching large brood female seatrout around schools of finger mullet. The best activity in the shallows will be from first light until about 9 a.m. As a rule, the bite is over once the bright morning sun starts penetrating the water.

Large seatrout are wary and totally in tune with their surroundings. What's more, they have good eye-

sight, and they're super sensitive to noise, vibrations or anything out of the norm. A 6-foot angler standing in the bow of a boat with wave action slapping against the hull is enough to spook a gator. You'll increase your hookups ten-fold if you anchor the boat and slip overboard and wade the shallows, going stealthy and undetected.

Soft-plastic jerkbaits have become the craze to the point they've virtually replaced traditional topwater hard baits for this brand of fishing. But it's important to remember that bigger trout key on mullet. It makes sense that larger baits imitating an injured mullet stand a better chance of being struck than a smaller twitchbait. The bigger baits slosh, shake and rattle on the surface when worked properly, and that action serves as an attractor. If you insist on staying in the boat, use a heavier hard bait that can be cast to distant, unsuspecting seatrout.

Ocean fishing kicks in this month with some of the bigger tournaments in June. June can be a big month for dolphin out of all the inlets. Finding



Wyatt Hardwicke didn't care for trolling until he dragged in a couple of dolphin at The Steeples.

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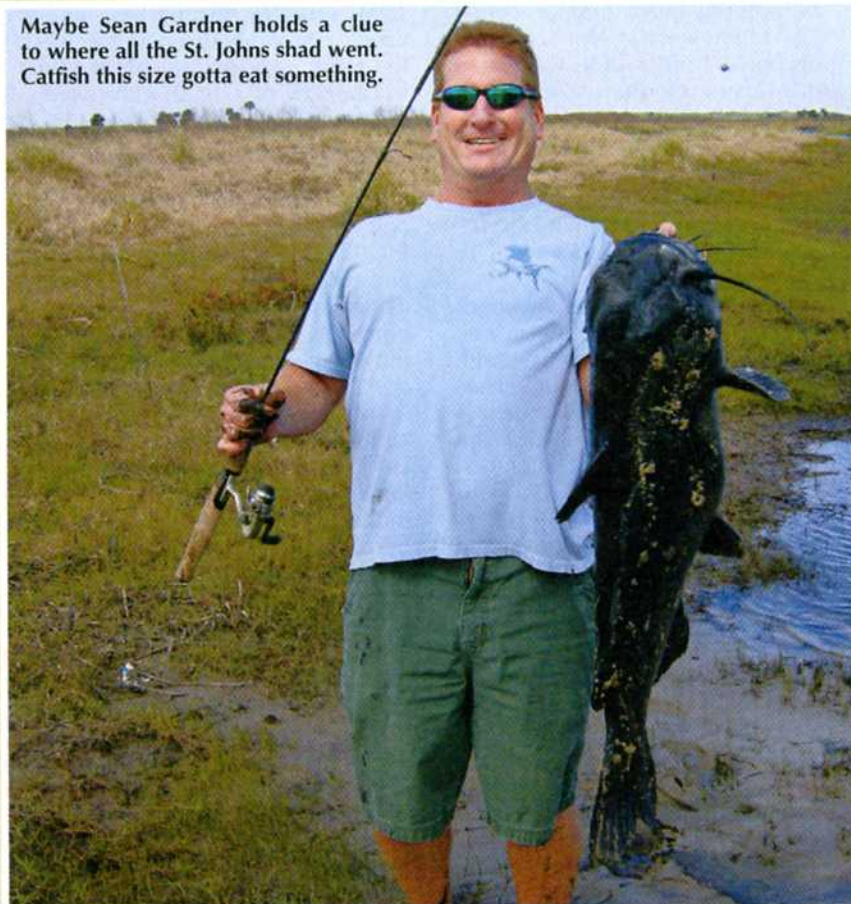
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Maybe Sean Gardner holds a clue to where all the St. Johns shad went. Catfish this size gotta eat something.

weedlines is the key for numbers. Dolphin anglers keep hoping for a banner year. The pickings haven't been good in recent years.

Those with big boats and even bigger budgets head east of the Gulf Stream for yellowfin tuna. Some years the larger 80- to 90-pounders don't show until later in the season, but everything depends on water temperature and the amount of bait.

Schoolie kingfish typically stack up within a couple miles of the beach north and south of Sebastian Inlet until the end of June. Some schools hold

12- to 14-pounders while others consist of 20- to 24-pounders with the occasional 30.

Experts such as Capt. Charlie Fornabio, a river and inshore guide from Wabasso who fishes the kings this time of the year, say 40 feet of water along the dropoff from the outer reef is the ticket to finding the kings.

"Usually it starts off as a morning bite," Fornabio said. "I troll mullet around schools of threadfin (Atlantic thread herring) that are up near the surface. Then about 9:30 a.m., the threadfin go down and that's when glass minnows move in. That pulls in schools of Spanish mackerel and false albacore. The kingfish are opportunists that go after the mackerel later in the day, so I'll troll those areas where I see activity."

Fornabio rigs 8- and 9-inch live mullet on 3/0 and 5/0 Owner bait hooks with No. 5 wire. He uses a free-swinging single stinger hook on a separate 4-inch length of wire. He usually trolls with 25-pound mono.

Tarpon are another inshore possibility. They generally follow a 78-degree temperature line along the beaches. Sebastian again is a good starting point, with the fish usually south of the inlet, perhaps as far as Wabasso

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and Vero Beach. A couple weeks later they move north toward Patrick AFB and Cocoa Beach, and into the Canaveral Bight area south of the tip of Cape Canaveral.

Nothing from the sea tastes better than whiting fillets. These delicious little bottom feeders move into the surf in May and June for a pre-spawning feed. When you locate a concentration you'll catch a fish on every cast.

A simple sliding-sinker rig with a small barrel sinker on the main line above a swivel connecting to the leader is all you need. Use a No. 4 hook and a small piece of fresh shrimp for bait. No leader is needed.

One trick is to peel the shrimp. Fresh shrimp will out-produce frozen shrimp. Sandfleas also will get strikes. Whiting can be tight to the beach in the first trough, or you'll find them in depressions and holes, so little more than a flip cast is necessary on a small river rod. It's a great opportunity for kids, so let them do the fishing.

Best Bet: EAST CENTRAL

No doubt fly fishermen value the strong fight of a copperhead bluegill more than anyone, and May and June



Bluegills aren't the only panfish that chase flies. John Calaway and Matt Van Ert figured out how to entice tasty tilapia.

are the months to find these stubborn little panfish on their spawning beds and in quantity.

Most any slow-sinking spider will bring strikes from fish protecting their fanned-out bedding areas. Keep in mind they like to build their nests against seawalls, along rock shorelines, and tight against bulrush and other thick vegetation. If you can see

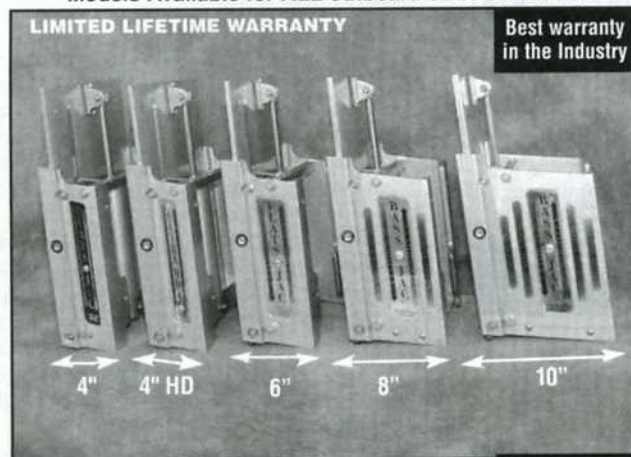
the beds you can sight fish the spawners, even with surface poppers, preferably No. 6 or No. 8 bugs in chartreuse or white.

But here's the trick. Cast the bug directly over the bed and allow it to remain motionless. Don't pop it. Soon the male or female will sprint toward the surface and grab the intruder.

—Bill Sargent

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