

OUTDOORS

FISHING REPORT

BEST BET

Captain Michael Shellen of Shellen Guide Service out of Buck Head Ridge reported speckled perch fishing is at its peak on Lake Okeechobee. Anglers are catching their limits of large spec's in heavy cover along the north shore using jigs and live minnows. Largemouth bass fishing has been almost as good. Live shiners are being eaten by hungry bass about as fast as you can put them in the water. Artificial lures like the senko's, flukes and top water baits, swim baits and jigs are all catching bass. Some of the best action is coming along the grassy weedlines and in heavy cover. This past week, a 10.8-ounce largemouth was weighed in and released. That angler had 40 other bass as well.

MIAMI-DADE/BROWARD

Captain Tom Zask from Topshotfishing Charters out of Fort Lauderdale reported fishing offshore of Port Everglades has been producing steady catches of sailfish outside of 200 feet of water. Closer in kingfish to 30 pounds are being caught on live goggle eye jacks fished under a kite. Captain Nestor Alvisa of Hooked on Flamingo charters reported finding all the Spanish mackerel his customers wanted just offshore of Key Biscayne in 20 feet of water. Alvisa saw two terns dive, anchor his boat in that area and started chumming with a block of frozen chum. In no time his clients were hooked up with hungry 3-pound mackerel that ate their live pilchards. Chris Tam of Canada fished in South Biscayne Bay with captain Mo Estevez and caught and released his first bonefish. Tam caught the bonefish on a live shrimp on the first of the incoming tide on an Oceanside shallow flat.

KEYS

IslamoradaSportFishing.com reported with the constant wind they have been having the offshore boats continue to do well on dolphins along the blue water edge. On the calmer days, blackfin tuna are biting over the Humps. On the outer reef sailfish, kingfish and a few nice wahoo are being caught on live ballyhoo and pilchards. On the bottom, mutton and yellowtail snappers are being caught in good numbers. The patch reefs are producing good amounts of cero mackerel, an assortment of snappers, jacks and groupers for catch and release.

TREASURE COAST

Henry Caimotto from the Snook Nook Bait and Tackle in Jensen Beach reported on the beaches big whiting, bluefish and a few pompano are being caught on clams, cut bait and sand fleas. South of the St. Lucie Inlet in the "King Hole," lots of Spanish mackerel are being caught on almost anything thrown in the water. In 60 feet of water, vermillion and mutton snapper are biting on the bottom, and plenty of sailfish and dolphins are providing angler's action in 100 feet of water on trolled ballyhoo.

FLORIDA BAY

Captain Jason Sullivan of Rising Tide Charters reported finding quite a few hungry redfish high up on the shallow flats in Florida Bay. His clients fed these redfish weedless Gulp soft plastics and shrimp pattern flies. His clients also had action from large tarpon and shots at a few hungry snook up on the flats. Fishing in deeper water around the islands, his clients caught sea trout to four pounds.

SOUTHWEST COAST

Captain Todd Geroy of Naples reported finding a lot of pompano in the backcountry channels and cuts. The pompano are eating small jigs tipped with a piece of shrimp where there is a strong current next to a channel and flat. The pompano are feeding near the bottom. Quite a few sea trout are being caught while fishing for the pompano.

FRESHWATER

Alan Zaremba reported largemouth-bass fishing in the L-4 and L-6 canals has been producing up to 66 largemouth bass to six pounds during a day. The bass are eating suspend Rapala lures, Chug Bugs and Gambler Ribbon tailed worms. Peacock bass are biting in the C-100 canal. The peacock bass are eating Clouser minnows for the fly fishermen.

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FISH COUNTING



CARLOS ESTAPE/COURTESY PHOTO

KEEPING CLOSE COUNT: A volunteer diver records the number of porkfish at Alligator Reef off Islamorada.

A numbers game that puts divers up close with fish

■ **Carlos and Allison Estape started their own fish count at Alligator Reef, reigniting their passion for scuba diving on their home reef.**

BY SUSAN COCKING
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ISLAMORADA — Back in the 1960s, University of Miami marine scientist Walter Starck recorded 517 species of fish in and around Alligator Reef off Islamorada — the greatest number recorded from any one place in the Americas at that time.

Today, following decades of human and natural impacts, this coral ledge topped by a lighthouse and fringed with rubble and sea grass still delights scientists and divers with its rich species diversity.

Islamorada underwater photographers Carlos and Allison Estape — volunteers with the nonprofit Reef Environmental Education Foundation (REEF) — recently embarked on their own fish count at Alligator Reef, a no-take zone ever

since the 1997 implementation of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary management plan. The couple is up to just over 100 species on a single dive, with the photographs to prove it. Lad Akins, long-time operations director for REEF, said the Upper Keys sanctuary preservation area is among only a few other known locations in the tropical Western Atlantic with a one-dive, 100-plus fish species count. Chief among them is the tiny island of Bonaire in the southern Caribbean.

"Both are protected areas, but other than that, they're pretty different," Akins said.

For one thing, the Alligator Reef ledge is fairly shallow, while Bonaire lies on the edge of a steep coral wall. Both are popular scuba diving and snorkeling sites located at opposite ends of the Caribbean region.

The Estapes' findings might be important because the marine sanctuary advisory committee is con-

sidering tweaking the management zones within the 2,800 square-nautical-mile region. The committee could recommend reopening some areas to fishing and lobstering while closing others.

But for the Estapes themselves, the project has reignited their passion for scuba diving on their home reef.

"We track everything we see, where we saw it, the date we saw it," Allison said. "You feel like you're on an Easter egg hunt. You're always looking for something you've never seen before. It's super exciting to see a species you've never seen before."

The couple said they would make their images available to REEF as identification aids for future volunteer fish counts. They also would like to share them with scuba shops and clubs in the Keys and southeast Florida.

"People could scroll through and find things to look for," Allison said. "It would be great if some of the dive clubs in Miami

would get into this."

The Estapes' enthusiasm for fish counting often spreads to their diving companions. On a recent plunge at Alligator Reef from the Islamorada Dive Center boat, the couple — together with Akins, Keri Kenning, Ed Martin and Elizabeth Underwood — scoured the region for nearly two hours to a depth of about 25 feet armed with a fish ID booklet and a waterproof pencil and checklist.

Kenning quickly got into the spirit.

"I did cartwheels when I saw a small-mouthed grunt," she said. "I was in a school of 100 fish, and there it was."

The party also netted several invasive lionfish from the reef before returning to the boat to tally their results.

The final count for six divers: 117 species.

Akins said counting fish is like birding — but not.

"With birding, you're there with binoculars," he said. "Here, you're right up close to the fish."

SOCCER

ROUNDUP

Brazil struggles with World Cup stadium completions

From Miami Herald Wire Services

One of six Brazilian World Cup stadiums that had to be completed before the end of 2013 was symbolically delivered on New Year's Eve, although it won't be fully ready until the end of the month.

Local World Cup organizers in the northeastern city of Natal turned on the lights at the Arena das Dunas stadium for the first time on Tuesday to symbolize the venue's completion. The official inauguration, however, will only happen "probably" on Jan. 20, organizers said in a statement Wednesday in Sao Paulo.

Brazil starts the year without six of the 12 World Cup stadiums ready even though FIFA had set the end of 2013 as the final deadline. Six venues had been built for the Confederations Cup this year.

Soccer's world governing body usually wants all venues ready at least six months before the tournament starts so local organizers can host enough test events.

Brazilian organizers announced during the World Cup draw in December that none of the remaining six venues was expected to be delivered by the FIFA deadline. Delays have included financial problems, worker

safety issues and construction-site accidents.

Three construction workers died at stadiums late last year: one fell about 115 feet at the Arena Amazonia in the jungle city of Manaus, and two who were killed when a crane collapsed while hoisting a roofing structure at the stadium that will host the World Cup opener in Sao Paulo on June 12.

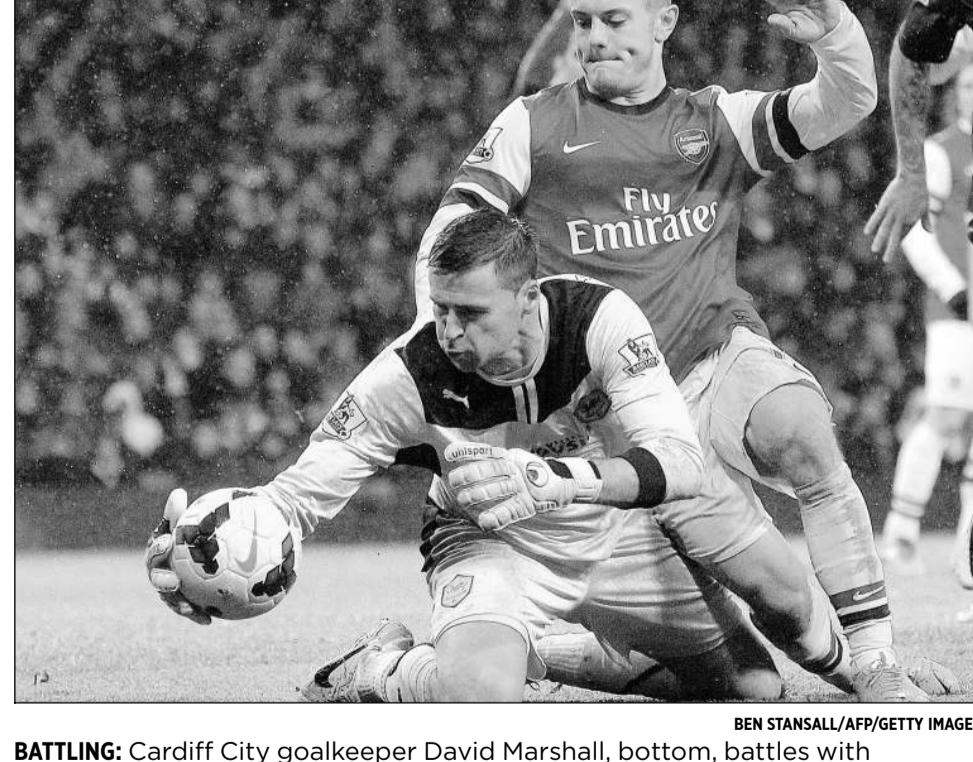
The Arena Amazonia is expected to be completed by the end of the month, but the stadium in Sao Paulo won't be ready until April.

The Arena da Baixada in the southern city of Curitiba, where organizers had difficulty securing financing for the stadium, is likely to be ready sometime in March or early April.

The Beira-Rio Stadium in the southern city of Porto Alegre is set to be completed in January and the Arena Pantanal in the wetlands city of Cuiaba is expected to be delivered in February.

ELSEWHERE

• **England:** Arsenal stayed atop the Premier League after scoring two late goals in a 2-0 win over Cardiff while fellow title rivals Manchester City, Chelsea and Liverpool also started the year with victories on Wednesday.



BEN STANSALL/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

BATTING: Cardiff City goalkeeper David Marshall, bottom, battles with midfielder Jack Wilshere during Arsenal's 2-0 win Wednesday in London.

However, the league trophy looks more out of reach than ever for Manchester United after the reigning champions lost 2-1 at home to Tottenham and fell 11 points behind Arsenal.

Nicklas Bendtner and **Theo Walcott** scored Arsenal's goals at Emirates Stadium to beat a resilient Cardiff

team which played in front of expected new manager Ole Gunnar Solskjær and frustrated the hosts for 88 minutes in the driving rain.

City remained a point behind in second after a 3-2 win at Swansea, while Chelsea's 3-0 victory at Southampton in awful weather conditions ensured Jose

Mourinho's team stayed in third place, two points behind the leaders.

After two consecutive losses, Liverpool climbed back into the top four after Luis Suárez scored his 20th goal of the season in a 2-0 win over Hull. Suárez set a Premier League record when he scored his 20th

goal in just 15 games after missing five matches with a suspension.

Spurs climbed above United into sixth place — two points behind Liverpool — after goals by Emmanuel Adebayor and Christian Eriksen earned them a second league win in a row at Old Trafford. United has now lost four times at home this season.

In other games, Everton fell to fifth by being held to a 1-1 draw by Stoke, Aston Villa beat last-place Sunderland 1-0, Fulham came back to win 2-1 over West Ham and climb out of the relegation zone, Crystal Palace tied Norwich 1-1 and West Bromwich Albion beat Newcastle 1-0.

Aston Villa ended its five-match winless run by beating Sunderland and goals from Steve Sidwell and Dimitar Berbatov helped Fulham defeat 10-man West Ham. Saido Berahino converted an 87th-minute penalty to secure the win for West Brom, overshadowing the return of Nicolas Anelka after his controversial goal celebration. Anelka started despite being the subject of a league investigation for celebrating a goal against West Ham on Saturday with a gesture that has anti-Semitic connotations.