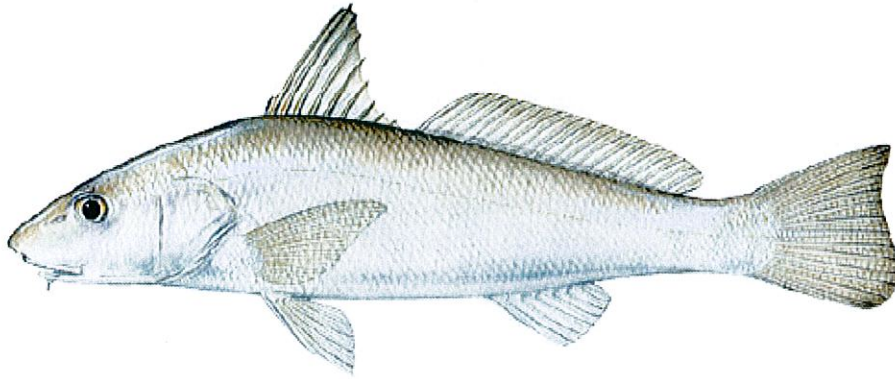


APRIL'S BEST BET
SEBASTIAN INLET STATE PARK



WHITING
(Menticirrhus littoralis)

DESCRIPTION: Members of the drum family, four species of whittings frequent the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts of the United States. Whittings are also commonly referred to as kingfish, especially north of Florida. The group is characterized by having a small, subterminal mouth, rather high, slender dorsal spines and a single barbel on the chin. Coloring of these species tends to be an overall silvery appearance, with some fish showing grey or copper mottling above. The gulf kingfish (*M. littoralis*) has a blackish tip on the caudal (tail) fin. Three of the species are common along the majority of the North Atlantic Coast, two being absent in South Florida, and one, the minkfish (*M. focaliger*) being confined to the Gulf of Mexico. The most common species caught in this area, the gulf kingfish, can reach a length of 18 inches, but more commonly averages lengths of 12 inches and weights of about one pound. Spawning takes place anytime from spring to early fall. Though small, whittings are considered an excellent eating fish, possessing tender white flesh.

HEIGHT OF SEASON: Whiting tend to be most prevalent in the inlet area and adjacent beaches in the springtime, especially the months of April and May. Surf fishermen in Brevard and Indian River counties take whiting regularly throughout the year.

RULES AND REGULATIONS: There are currently no laws regulating the size, seasons, and bag limits for whiting in the state of Florida. Take only what you can use. Keep up to date on changing rules and regulations. You will need a saltwater fishing license.

TIMES AND TIDES: There does not seem to be a preferred time of day or certain tide condition for those anglers seeking whiting. Many times whiting are a welcomed incidental catch for those trying to catch other species, especially pompano. I have seen whiting caught during both daylight and dark hours.

BAITS: Being that whiting are fairly small bottom dwelling fish, baits should be matched accordingly. Whiting here are almost exclusively taken on small, natural baits. Prime baits are sandfleas, cut pieces of fresh clams, or pieces of fresh shrimp. Occasionally whiting are taken on cut fish baits like mullet or pinfish. Rarely are whiting fished for with artificial baits, but on occasion I have seen them taken on small artificials of various sorts, especially those fished near the bottom.

TACKLE: Just about any type of fishing gear is applicable when it comes to fishing for whiting, depending on angler preference. If fishing the surf, standard surf gear designed for distance casting is generally used, but on calmer days certainly less bulky equipment would work. Since whiting rarely exceed a couple of pounds, those

that seek any "sport" in whiting fishing would want to use ultralight equipment. Rigs can include anything from the typical tandem "pompano" surf rigs to sliding sinker rigs, just put your bait on the bottom! Most important is matching hook size to bait size and catch size! Hooks in the #1 to 1/0 range work well for whiting. Try long shank hooks to make unhooking these eager bait takers less troublesome.

METHOD: There are probably more whiting taken in this area by surf fishing than by any other method. In the spring when the fish become more prevalent around the jetties, several are taken by jetty fishermen. Fish from the ocean sides of either jetty for whiting. I have only seen an occasional whiting caught inside the inlet channel. Fish your preferred rig on the bottom but with just enough weight to stay on the bottom. Rigs that drag (roll) with the current or wave action along the bottom can be very productive. Baits need not be large to catch whiting, try pieces about 1 inch in length.

PREPARATION: Whiting weighing a pound or more can produce some meaty fillets, great for frying. I remove the rib cage portion out of each fillet, but if you don't mind bones, leaving the rib cage will give you a larger fillet to work with. Smaller whiting, if kept, make a nice "panfish" meal. Remove the scales, head, and innards for a tender treat in which the meat can easily be removed from the bones after frying or baking whole. Fried whiting is said to be served well with grits.

ALSO THIS MONTH: Look for some "fatter" flounder to show up following along with the brief spring run of mature silver mullet. Snook fishing should continue to improve as the water warms up, with the best springtime baits for them including live shrimp and live pinfish. Still decent but wrapping up around the end of April will be pompano fishing and sport shrimping.

Take care, enjoy and respect the resource,

Ranger Ed Perry