

Keys fly fishing tip

After a fly-fishing customer books a trip with me, I usually get the question, "What flies and fly rods should I bring for my trip to the Keys?" I always tell them they are welcome to use my flies and rods so everything is ready to go when they get here.

Early in the morning with the sun rising and tailing fish to be found is no time to be stringing up rods and making leaders. Customers also do not have to lug their equipment through the airport.

Many customers insist they would like to use their own stuff. I get that. After all, they spent a lot of money on their rods and reels, and there is something to be said for catching a trophy fish on a fly you tied yourself.

This time of year, we are primarily targeting baby tarpon, permit, bonefish, barracuda and sharks. For baby tarpon, I like to use an 8- to 10-weight rod. Generally, I use a 10-weight rod for permit when the winds are up to help cast the heavy flies we're throwing. A 10-weight rod helps turn over the longer leaders usually used for permit fishing.

In summer, the winds are typically calm, and we usually use lighter flies so as to not spook the already-spooked permit. Wind speed is the factor in deciding whether to use an 8- or 10-weight rod.

For bonefish, I like a 7- to 9-weight rod. I prefer the heaviest rod you can get away with for bonefish so you can land the fish quickly. In the summer, we get higher water temperatures. I think it's too hard on the bonefish to fight them to complete exhaustion.

For sharks, I like 10- to 12-weight rods and for barracuda, I like 8- to 10-weight rods. Eight-weight works for smaller flies, and 10-weight rods help turn over the heavier 'cuda flies.

Many of the people working at our local fly shops are very knowledgeable and will help point you in the right direction as to what flies to choose.

I believe it was Flip Pallot who said a time-proven fly properly presented will fool them most of the time. I agree. I would not go looking for the newest and greatest fly pattern. I would use a time-proven classic.

If possible, buy or tie your flies with weed guards. They often help prevent you from get-

ting snagged on the bottom and are easily cut off with pliers or nail clippers if you feel you do not need them.

As for what colors to choose for your flies, it depends on the fish.

For sharks, life-jacket orange is hard to beat. For tarpon, I like darker flies in darker water and brighter flies in clearer water. When fishing for permit and bonefish, I like to match the color of the bottom I am fishing. More and more, I seem to choose flies that have dark and light colors so I am covered either way, as the bottom often changes constantly as you pole down a flat.

You cannot have too many different weighted flies in one fly pattern. To determine which weight to use on your fly, look at your surroundings on the flat.

How windy is it? A heavy fly plopping down next to a bonefish or permit will not be tolerated when the water surface is like glass. A lighter fly would be a better choice.

What is the current water flow? If the current is ripping, a lighter fly could quickly drift by a fish without being noticed. With strong current, a heavier fly would most likely be a better choice.

After you tie on a fly, toss it overboard and watch how quickly it sinks and how far it drifts before it hits the bottom. This way you will have a better idea how far to lead a fish when the shot comes.

This is just general information to help get you started. Nothing will prepare you better than simply spending time on the water watching your surroundings and observing how the fish react to your offerings. This process is never truly mastered, and that is what makes our sport so fun and challenging. Good luck.

Capt. Bob Beighley owns Double Haul Charters of Cudjoe Key. He is endorsed by Scott Fly Rods and runs daily charters. He can be reached at www.doublehaulcharters.com.

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