

A person wearing a white cap, a red bandana, and a light-colored long-sleeved shirt is standing on a boat, reeling in a large fish. The fish is arched in the air, creating a parabolic shape. The background shows a vast blue ocean under a clear blue sky with some light clouds. In the distance, a small boat is visible on the water.

Tarpon *megalops atlanticus*

The background of the slide is a photograph of a tarpon leaping from the water. The fish is in mid-air, its body arched, and a large, white splash of water is visible behind it. The water is a murky greenish-brown color.

The Silver King

- Tarpon are without a doubt the most spectacular sport fish in southwest Florida
- From 2-200 pounds the term silver king is no misnomer .
- Beauty, size, tenacity, aerial acrobatics and brute strength all in one package.

Tarpon facts

- Tarpon like fish have been discovered in fossils dating back over 100 million years
- Two species remain, one in the gulf-Atlantic and one in the Indo-Pacific.
- The huge mouth has a upturned lower jaw that contains a bony plate.
- A single dorsal with the distinctive last ray long and thin.

Geographical Distribution



Tarpon facts

- Large plate like scales that are round with a silver coating on the edge.
- Very large eyes.
- They can live over 50 years.
- Grow to eight feet and weigh over 280 pounds.
- Little food value, although they are eaten in south and central America.



Tarpon facts

- Until recently tarpon were thought to have a life span of only 15 years.
- Using more accurate techniques to count annually deposited rings in carbonates (otoliths) of fish, researchers found one tarpon that had lived 55 years.



Otolithes

- Finfish (class Osteichthyes) have three pairs of otoliths -
- The shapes and proportional sizes of the otoliths vary with fish species. Often, the fish species can be identified from distinct morphological characteristics of an isolated otolith.

Otolithes

- Fish otoliths accrete layers of calcium carbonate and gelatinous matrix throughout their lives. The accretion rate results in the appearance of rings that resemble tree rings. By counting the rings, it is possible to determine the age of the fish in years.



Range and habitat

- Tarpon prefer tropic and sub tropic waters.
- Most common from Virginia to central Brazil.
- Throughout the Caribbean Sea and the gulf of Mexico.
- Tarpon are sensitive to cold water.
- Found in depths as little as 3 feet to over 80 feet.



Habitat

- Tarpon populate a wide variety of habitats, but are primarily found in coastal waters, bays, estuaries, and mangrove-lined lagoons within tropical, subtropical, and temperate climates (45° N–30° S). The normal habitat depth extends to 98 feet (30 m). Although a marine fish, tarpon can tolerate euryhaline environments (0–47 parts per thousand) and often enter river mouths and bays and travel upstream into fresh water. In addition, tarpon can also tolerate oxygen-poor environments due to a modified air bladder that allows them to inhale atmospheric oxygen



Habitat



Range and habitat

- Tarpon thrive in a variety of habitats.
- Adults move offshore to marine waters to spawn.
- Their larvae make its way back inshore to marshes and mangrove embayment and in estuaries.
- Adults can be found in a wide range of habitats.

Range and habitat

- Habitats: from offshore and near shore coastal waters to stagnant pools off riverine habitats.
- From back, oxygen depleted bays to passes and river mouths with strong tidal currents.
- Found on coral reefs in the keys and in landlocked ponds and golf course lakes.



Range and habitat

- It's generally accepted that tarpon migrate but very little is known about the frequency or extent of their travels.
- Tarpon caught and released in Florida have been recaptured as far west as Louisiana and as far north as South Carolina.
- Several studies are under way to learn more about migratory patterns .

Size, Age & Growth

- Female tarpon can grow to lengths of over 8.2 feet (2.5m) and reach weights of near 355 pounds (161 kg), with the males generally smaller. Tarpon are slow-growing fish and do not obtain sexual maturity until reaching an age of 6-7 years and a length of about 4 feet (1.2 m).

Size, Age & Growth

- Tarpon weighing about 100 pounds (45.4 kg) typically fall between 13-16 years of age. Male tarpon attain lifespans of over 30 years, while females may live longer than 50 years. A female tarpon held in captivity at the John G. Shedd Aquarium in Chicago, Illinois died in 1998 at the age of 60



Life history

- On the west coast tarpon begin to gather in large groups as early as March and by May and June they congregate in areas near the coast preparing to journey offshore to their spawning grounds.
- This is when they can be seen “daisy chaining”

Life history

- Anywhere from 5-200 tarpon will “daisy chain”. Swim in a circle, nose to tail. Daisy chaining is thought to be a prenuptial tarpon tango that prepares the fish for spawning.
- Once their breeding groups are together they will move up to 100 miles out in the gulf to spawn
- This takes place on the strong tides of the new and full moons of late Spring and Summer.

Tarpon “daisy chaining”



Aerial image of tarpon "daisy chaining"

Life history

- It is estimated that a female tarpon can produce from 4.5-20.7 million eggs.
- The larger and heavier the fish the more eggs she is likely to shed.
- No one knows exactly where tarpon spawn.
- Tarpon larvae only a few days old has been collected 125 miles off shore.
- Spawning takes place mainly in May, June and July.

Tarpon larvae leptocephali



Tarpon life history

- Leptocephali or tarpon larvae drift toward shore for 20-30 days before reaching the estuaries and back water nurseries.
- By the time they reach these inshore areas, they are about an inch long.
- This is when they transform into the shape and look of a tarpon.

Tarpon life history

- These juveniles make their way into marshes and mangrove swamps.
- They live their first year in these back waters.
- Growing to over a foot long in the first two years.

Tarpon life history

- Tarpon are often found in schools.
- They can tolerate a wide range of salinity.
- They are sensitive to cold water and become stressed when the water dips below 55 Fahrenheit.
- Adults can usually make it to deeper warmer water but young fish are less able to escape cold waters.



The big question

Why do tarpon roll?

- Tarpon have a unique adaptation that no doubt has contributed to survival for millions of years.
- They have the ability to breath both above and below the water.
- When dissolved oxygen levels are adequate, tarpon breath like most fish.
- But when the levels are low they gulp air.

The big question

Why do tarpon roll?

- This gulped air is transferred to a special swim bladder.
- This bladder works as an accessory lung.
- It also is used to compensate their buoyancy.
- Allowing them to use less energy while swimming at the desired depth.

- Perhaps the most unique internal feature of the tarpon is the modified swim bladder. This swim bladder contains spongy alveolar tissue and has a duct leading to the esophagus that the tarpon may fill directly with air gulped from the surface. This feature allows the tarpon to take oxygen directly from the atmosphere and increases its tolerance of oxygen-poor waters. In fact, studies have shown that tarpon must have access to atmospheric oxygen in order to survive, and that juvenile tarpon are obligatory air-breathers. Adults living in oxygen-rich waters still roll and gulp air, probably as an imitative pattern based on visual perception of other tarpon.

Flyfishing for Tarpon

- The Everglades offers wonderful opportunities to fly fish for tarpon.
- Although its possible to catch a tarpon any month of the year, Spring and Summer are prime times.
- We recommend an 11-12 Wt. rods but many clients use 10 wts. (We have Sage, Thomas and Thomas and Loomis rods With Tibor Reels you are welcome to use)

Flyfishing for Tarpon

- Connor and Joe are happy to build your leaders and supply tarpon flies.
- One of our favorites that worked well this season is the Enrico Puglisi “Tarpon SP bunny Black/Purple # 1/0



Fishing for tarpon

- The first records of people fishing for tarpon was in the late 1800' s.
- Fisherman in canoes hunted tarpon with harpoons and hand lines.

Plugs for tarpon

- In early spring large tarpon will gather in the back bays of the Everglades.
- One common denominator is the depth. These fish seem to like 4 to 7 feet of water.
- Plugs that run about 2-3 feet below the surface work best.
- The # 1 choice of tarpon guides for the last 30 years is the Heddon “**Lucky 13**”

“Lucky 13” by Heddon





Yo-zu-ri “Crystal Minnow



Mirror lure “77 and 72m18



Fishing for tarpon

- Sport fishing for tarpon has evolved into an art that has become a compulsive disorder in many anglers.
- Ted Williams named tarpon one of the three greatest game fish in the world.

Places to fish for tarpon

- Back bays where tarpon lay up
- Shallow bays on the outside near the gulf where tarpon will lay in the sun
- Offshore from a few hundred yards to a few mile.
- In passes and river mouths where mullet and other bait fish congregate.
- Around reefs and wrecks.