

LINEBURNER

VOLUME 243 PRICELESS

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FEB 21

Features
Reef Barramundi Cod
Daintree Coastal
Spangled Emperor Focus
Plus Local Reports





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Contact Us if you'd like to
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Jamie Beitzel's
On the Daintree
with a Bar Cheek
Trout caught
near Snapper Is



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Rare Reef Barramundi

By Heff

In the tropics there are only what many consider to be exotic species you can catch. They are not overly common to hook into if you get my drift. Along the coast it maybe the likes of permit, threadfin salmon or even a Qld Groper. On the reef it extends to the likes of maori wrasse, coronation trout or even the amazing cattle dog or purple cod just to name a very few.

There's however one special species which is one way or another covers both territories. Both look similar in many ways with physical body shape yet the big silvery, bucket mouth known as river barramundi live as where suggested. The other type I'm referring to, carrying the same name sake lives on the reef with it's own remarkable qualities. It is the Barramundi Cod!

It has the same facial structure, thick set body and a decent paddle tail. Yet the Cod are very unique, like no other with a pale appearance and dotted with the most incredible dark & contrasting dots. Considered a rare species they have been for years been allocated to the protected species list and must be released. Just recently our Dragon Lady Charter caught and released 3 in the one day and we'll explain further. When you only expect to

see a bare handful over a year period this was one out of the blue.

Chatting with Skipper Steve he was quite surprised at the outcome and suspected they were fishing in an area this day nearer to the reef when they were around potentially to spawn or even pair up. There's not a lot of information to be drawn about them but it is considered they do pair up as a male and female combination, even maybe for life. There's a lot of examples like this in the animal kingdom.

Steve said you've got be so careful with these guys because they don't take well to being caught on a line and definitely hate being out of the water. He said they are a very brittle species and if mishandled they can keel over very quickly. Time is of the essence he said in regards to de-hooking with the upmost care, the quickest of photos and putting them back into the drink pronto. There's no time to carry on like a 'pork chop'. Being a protected species you can't afford to have a dead one lying around on your deck with a hefty fine attached.

Back in the day ages ago, when they were available to keep those that have had the rare opportunity to consume them rated them right at the top. Unlike its coastal cousin which most do enjoy, in comparison the river Barramundi is like eating boiled lollies to enjoying Lindt chocolate of the Barramundi Cod. ■



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Berley - What's Your Mix ?

By Heff

Up here in the tropics it is not a common topic that is discussed. Because we are blessed with so much opportunity and location, a lot of us tend to move on during a trip to so called greener pastures. However there's still a few die hards which continue to persist with this oldest of fishing methods. They claim a good berley mix can bring the fish on the bite and increase your catch rate. They are probably absolutely correct.

Talking with long term mate Jamie Beitzel, who runs the best river and coastal trip in the region up on the Daintree we got to talking on this subject recently. Still to this day on charter he will activate a berley trail if proceedings are a bit quiet. The key is the smell of the trail with small fragments floating through the water. The basic concept is to attract smaller fish which in turn attracts the bigger predators. But often a bigger fish will pick up the trail and follow it to your hook. Up here it's used more so on the reef and at river entrances on occasions. A lot of trailer boats nowadays have a berley bucket attached to the transom of the boat so you can coffee plunge the berley into the water when you decide. Otherwise you can do it by hand throwing the mix over the side at intervals. An important note to consider you don't want to over feed any fish with fragments too big. You just want to tempt their taste buds into feeding on your presentation.

Interestingly Jamie never disregards much after a day's catch on the water. He'll take home the fish heads and frames to use for a berley concoction or keep it as crab pot bait. He does reckon mackerel heads make for the best crab pot bait for your information.

When it comes to a berley mix he'll use any



older pilchard, squid or prawn bait he may have used, which is not that often. He's more a live bait and lure specialist. But the fish heads and frames he'll put to good use. He has an old fashioned mincer in the yard and will grind all and sundry into a fine pulp and freeze it into blocks. It is somewhat some may refer to as a 'Berley Bomb'!

It will slowly defrost in the water releasing a tasty trail to entice a bite if required. He says don't use old smelly stuff in the preparation process as this can be an absolute turn off for the fish. Fresh is best as always! Jamie says that if you think you may have a tougher day on charter or doing your own thing, it is worthwhile taking along some berley to spark things up.

He did mention that some of the older locals swear by Aniseed oil rubbed on their bait as an extra. Apparently the scent is similar to the extracts that their prey release naturally. Wife's tale or fact, not sure.

One of the best mixes I saw to bring on the mackerel was a combination of crushed pilchard for the smell and also crushed cornflakes or weetbix. The pilchard is explanatory enough, but I guess the tiny fragments of flakes floating amongst the smell trail resembled like something had been crunched to pieces. The spanish mackerel turned up in numbers and were switched on to devour anything presented to them. It was an exciting session of fishing.

Anyway all this is something to consider if you are the consummate angler of fishing preparation and determined will. ■



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The Dragon's Den

By Steve Adamson

Welcome to our February report which I'm pleased to say offers a bit more than previous years. Our records say February is definitely our hibernation time but we have been awoken from our slumber at various times in 2021. Actually March, coming up looks way more busier as well which is a good sign people are keen to travel here at the moment on the provision they can get up here. In my opinion it is purely and simply time to stop these crazy border closures and deal with the problem if a small outbreak occurs of Covid. The issue is some states are way better than others and I think our QLD Premier is super scared of the tiniest case as she's not confident to deal with it with her systems in place. It's just too easy to shut the border in her mind. In the meantime the QLD main tourism precincts are getting a hiding to none.

Anyway all we can do is paint a good picture and we'll look at what we've been up to recently. The charter trips we have completed have been based around the weather and sufficient numbers to run. As most would know there has been a decent dose of rain around this month, with on occasions some inclement sea conditions. In saying this it has been reasonable more often than not.

The fishing however has been okay to just plain tough. Our better days have seen multiple species come back to the dock with the likes of coral trout, spangled emperor and the better eating trevally species. It is, I believe the toughest month to muster up a top quality batch of fish. The nannygai, except the odd stonker have been hard to catch. They are simply not biting at the moment. I have a bit more to say on this shortly. The trout are patchy catching 1-3 each spot, yet the trevally have been handy giving the clients some shoulder stretching exercises.

As we've announced previously we do possess a



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commercial licence to sell to the market. We only do this if we have to in quiet times to turn a dollar and much prefer our recreational charter aspect of the business. Mid month, with bookings on the slim we went for a 3 day commercial fish on the new moon. To be honest it was dead quiet barring a few good stops. I must say at this point we travel way north for this exercise and would never take a crack at our local daily haunts.

The beauty about commercial fishing, and we don't go too hard, is that you can sit on a spot that you've sounded up with a good bunch of fish and sit and wait for the bite. Up to 2hrs at a time we sat there on this trip. Once the bite happens then you've got to get stuck into it. As mentioned the nannygai schools would not play ball, not at all. Our better fishing was on rubble patches catching emperors, including 8 big reds around on one bit of ground around the 7kg range. Other than this we had a bright moment or two on the coral trout and the rest was what you'd buy as reef species on the market. Nothing wrong with them but at a cheaper price. We are looking at another commercial fish around the full moon soon and there may be a bit more happening, weather providing of course.

In the meantime we'll chip away at a bit of work on the boat and accept things will and have been traditionally quieter at this time of year. Fingers crossed the March weather will be kind to absorb some promising bookings we hold. ■

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Breathing in the Saltaire

By Damian Colette



The quiet month of February for us was a bit better than expected in regards to bookings. This indicates that people are keen to travel here if allowed by our bloody Premier. She hasn't got a clue to the impact it has on the tourism sector when she chops and changes the border closures. I know personally, friends of mine, of a dozen businesses which have closed permanently never to re-open. It's just been too much for too long. Unfortunately I sense there's going to be a lot more of this tragic outcome.

Onto the fishing and we completed quite a few trips covering various aspects including Gt popper fishing, trolling light tackle, reef fishing and snorkelling. The weather was mostly fine with the odd day in more challenging conditions but it was mainly rain and not the wind.

We snared a few decent Gt's across the surface on popper, got several mackerel trolling around which were around 5-6kg and rustled up some good reef fish including coral trout, nannygai, jobfish and some cattle dog cod which was a bonus.

My son Jake, has just completed his first two months of skippering the boat with his new ticket, and he has done a great job cutting his teeth in what is a harder couple of months fishing on the reef. The feedback has been positive and he'll only learn more every time he heads out. Going from working the deck for years to skippering holds more pressure to deliver the results.

He's done admirably in this department. I'm pleased to say we now have the 60ft Shaka game boat up in FNQ having just recently driven it up from the Gold Coast. This is a very exciting prospect moving forward and I'm more than happy to say it is the best extended live aboard boat up this way by a mile. The next couple of months will entail a bit of an update inside but it is minimal. I'm extremely proud to be able to offer this as part of our operation and look forward to some big trips on her this year. If you want have a look at Heff's website, our managing agent at Fishing Port Douglas, to have a look at the run down on this amazing vessel.

Moving into March, sea temperatures will gradually drop which only enhances the chances of hooking into better numbers of fish. They have been a bit finicky at times lately but they'll soon change their tune in favour of the angler. ■



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The Inverted Seabed

By Heff

It is a very appropriate time to re-visit the inverted seabed with a good substantial rain coming off the mountains on a regular basis. In Laymen's terms they are called Wonky Holes found predominantly between the mainland and out to the inside of the outer Great Barrier Reef.

Wonky holes are located adjacent to river beds which existed in the last glacial period ending about 11,000 years ago. At that time of the last glacial peak a lot of the planet experienced a freeze over of all rivers. The sediment in the now submerged river beds from that period has been covered with coral in many places. However since the sediment is more permeable than the surrounding materials, it channels fresh water to thin spots in the seabed (mainly coastal), creating the fresh water springs called wonky holes.

The nutrients carried by the fresh water attract fish and fishermen. Coral does not grow well in the fresh water, resulting in irregular growth around wonky holes. The rough bottoms around the outlet tend to capture fishing nets and the prawn trawling fleet avoid them like the plague.

Several hundred holes are known along the coast between Townsville and Cape York. Water flowing along the submarine river beds and exiting at wonky holes can be charged with nutrients carried from the mainland. With the Daintree Rainforest on our doorstep and a very high annual rainfall we have many of these along our immediate coast with the odd one still out of the main reef and beyond for those in the know.

In a nutshell they are ancient underwater rivers which release into the ocean when the



surrounding mountain water table deep down rises. For most of the year the Wonky Holes remain dormant not attracting much marine activity but come to life in the wet season. It is like a release valve of some sorts and an amazing phenomena.

These Wonky Holes when releasing the purest of fresh water into the salt environment attract a variety of fish species in the name of basic bait life, to sharks, to mackerel, to massive cod and targeted big oversized large mouth nannygai (highly prized).



There's a bit more known about them now but for years they remained a big secret. An individual Wonky Hole may only possess a few decent fish at a time and seem to be a stop over on the circuit route for some fish like the big nannygai. Big cod tend to stay a bit longer from what we can gather. Mackerel and sharks will follow the bait life. Generally speaking if you hook into a fish like a cod or nannygai it will be big, and I mean big. Cod to 20-30kg and large mouth up to 10kg.

There's quite a few locals that are onto this style of fishing but seriously there's only a bare few of good charter operators that know what they are doing in regards to this. I'm not at total liberty to say much more but if you spot on your sounder an inverted spike into the sea floor the shape of a upside down triangle (opposite to a coral reef spike), particularly along the coast - then it is more than likely an ancient Wonky Hole.

If you would like to experience a charter of this calibre contact me at Fishing Port Douglas. Here's a couple of recent pics to get you really thinking. ■




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Local News in Brief

By Heff



Rainfall Prediction

March rainfall is likely to be above average across large parts of eastern Australia and FNQ. Furthermore March to May (autumn) rainfall is likely to be wetter than average for our part of the sea board.

Maximum and minimum temperatures for autumn are also expected to be above average across most of our region.

The good news is the La Niña continues in the tropical Pacific, but is past its peak strength. However, it is still expected to influence Australia's rainfall during this outlook period. La Niña typically increases the likelihood of above average rainfall across eastern and northern Australia during summer and early autumn.

the water temperature running through the cooling systems. This however has stabilised recently on the boats with temperatures hovering around 31 degrees.

On the Local Street

The continual shutting and re-opening of the QLD borders has unfortunately been the final straw for quite a few local businesses. With the potential end of the Job Keeper program around the corner there will likely be more people lining up for the dole. When we are truly open for business it's very apparent people are keen to travel to FNQ and Port Douglas. With vaccinations rolling out, those of us left are really hoping for a bumper season with Aussies forced to holiday within the country. This could have been the case last year but as we know the overseas quarantine program debacle ruined this for the tourism and hospitality industry. Our main hub at the Port Douglas Marina remains a very sorry sight with about 25% of overall boat operators keeping the books ticking over. Luckily for us, our boats at Fishing Port Douglas with name, reputation and experience, it has seen us through the worst of the storm. All we hope is that we can fulfill the promising bookings ahead.

Cyclone Outlook

There's nothing on the immediate horizon but every northern tropical wet season has had at least one tropical cyclone cross the Australian coast. Cyclones can develop at any time throughout the tropical cyclone season, which runs from November to April. Basically in the Far North we have two more months to not become complacent. The gradual weakening on the La Nina system will work in our favour.

Sea Temperatures

This was an interesting one locally in the last couple of months as water temperatures on the reef were slightly higher than normal up to 33 degrees celcius. It was noted with our reef boats that actual engine temperatures were marginally higher on a daily basis due to

Warning !!

With quite a few bookings coming in or attempting to be booked by the Fish Booker website - PLEASE DON'T !!

It is an American based company which rips off 10% of every trip booked, **the money leaves the country immediately** and it leaves the clients with very little correct confirmation and contacts for who they booked. There is no personal interaction and we've seen more often than not dissatisfied clients because they thought they were booking something different.

They are a highly based paid add on Google, likely part of Silicon Valley which has a problematic grip on fishing tours around Australia.

People who love their fishing and book through this website simply don't realise they are taking away 10% of the local operators bottom line



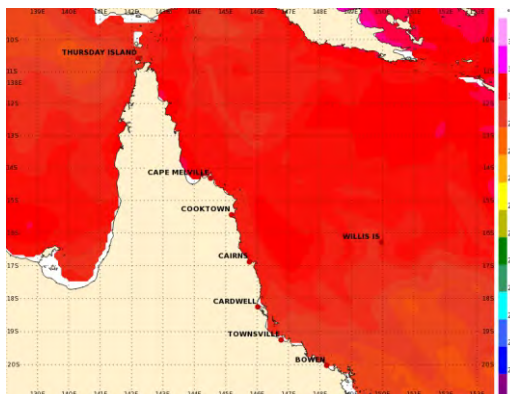

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Sea Rabbits of the Reef

By Heff



The good old Spangled Emperor is one of the more common species caught on the Great Barrier Reef but probably doesn't quite get the recognition of more other desired species like coral trout, nannygai and also its cousin the red emperor. I'm not sure why because they taste great, fight hard averaging mostly between 3-6kg and they are a vibrant, beautiful looking fish. They are caught all year round but really come to the fore in the warmer months when a lot of other species can take a backward step. You'll find them in all levels of the water column from the deep, along reef edges and right up into the shallows. Particularly under the cover of darkness they will get right up into a few metres of water working over rubble and sandy areas. They are a great night time fish if you are anchored right up behind a reef, even in the very shallows.

During the day they can be found mixing it with the nannygai schools or red emperor, but at night it seems they like to herd together and push up as a group into the shallower grounds. Like a few species that gather and feed at night, they tend to work over a patch of turf in a circle like fashion. They'll come on the bite hard and fast then stop. They then can turn up again 15-20 minutes later in the same fashion. It's like they are on a circuit which they must follow.

There's a couple of other names they are referred to by the locals including sand snapper for their movements and sea rabbits because they can turn up in huge numbers. Both names are in reference mainly to their nocturnal habits.

With a minimum size limit of 45cm they need to be a good sized fish to keep. With a bag limit of 5 per person, a group of say 4 mates can come back to ramp with up to 20 of these fish. That's not a bad top up with other fish you may catch. There's nothing special required to catch them including a standard reef rig and a combination of squid and pilchard on your hook.

Now when it comes to processing 'the Spangled' gilled and gutted is and all fine when cooked whole. Filleting is a bit more of a process however. With a hard exterior of scales and an awkward knob across the back it is easier to approach them from the belly side first. Then it becomes easier to navigate your way across the top section. after a couple of goes with a few fish it becomes easier.

On our summer time reef charters they have been a significant part of each day's catch to take home. Clients from down south are absolutely wrapped to catch them and they make for a great photo. I reckon the good old Sea Rabbit deserves a bit more credit from us spoilt locals. Don't dismiss them as a quality catch ! ■



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With Jamie Beitzel



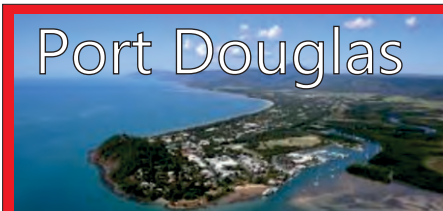
The first half of February for us was quite a busy period with numbers of people around. I highly suspect the second half had a lot to do with the border closure aimed at Victoria for 2 weeks ceasing a lot of potential business. Hopefully with the rollout of the vaccination program we won't have to endure this crazy political knee jerk reaction, which we are all fed up with.

Now down to a topic I'm way more comfortable voicing my opinion about and that is fishing. We've spent a lot of time roaming the coastline checking out inshore patches, wonky holes and wrecks. We've also spent quite a bit of time not far from Snapper Island which has been holding a lot of bait and producing handsomely for us. The majority of quality catches have included large mouth nannygai, bar cheek trout, spanish mackerel and some great trevally including a favourite, the 'Golden' variety. With a good dose of rain in the last month or so a lot of bait is thrust along the coastline inviting some good sized fish. Being able to source some good sardine live bait and taking it along the coast has paid dividends. Not much will take a second look at these tasty morsels, instead they will simply grab it before anyone else does. Once a line is put down below with a sardine on it's only a matter of seconds before it is grabbed and the rod is bent in half. It's great fun and with the electric motor we can now chase down more fish if needed, without pulling up the anchor from the depths. I am now an absolute convert for the electric motor, even on the reef. It

saves on the poor old body and also has improved our catch rate on some big troublesome fish.

I have spent some time in the river and for the most I've been able deliver some great results. With the amount of rain about the river has been quite dirty and the better fishing has definitely been down around the mouth, associated mangroves and across the flats out of the main channel. I've been wrapped to produce barramundi, bigger queenfish, fingermark and grunter. Even in the most challenging of conditions I have driven home afterwards very satisfied with the charter. I'm expecting a bit more of the same within the river as indications are there's a bit more of the wet season to come. Unless it goes pear shaped I've got a petty good grip on where to get value from fishing the Daintree River itself.

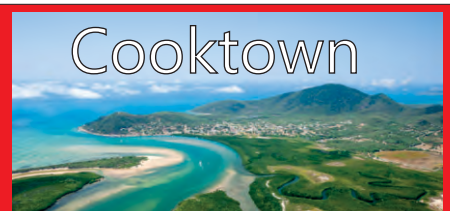
Whilst I can I will hook into some maintenance because March looks handy on the books and April looks like it will go gang busters. ■



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Reel Cooking with Mick Hart

Vietnamese Crispy Barramundi



INGREDIENTS

2 tbs peanut or sunflower oil
4 barramundi fillets
1/4 wombok, thinly sliced (or cabbage)
1 red onion, thinly sliced
6 Dutch carrots (we used purple)
2 bird's eye chillies, thinly sliced
1 bunch coriander, leaves picked
1 bunch mint, leaves picked
100g bean sprouts

DRESSING

1 tsp brown sugar
1 1/2 tbs rice wine vinegar
Juice of 2 limes
2 tbs peanut or sunflower oil
1 tbs fish sauce

METHOD

Heat oil in a frypan over medium-high heat. Add the barra (make sure it has been de-scaled), skin side down, and cook, pressing down for 2 minutes to flatten, then for a further 4 minutes or until skin is crisp and golden.

Turn and cook for 3 minutes or until cooked through. Set aside to rest, lightly covered in foil. For the dressing, combine all the ingredients and set aside.

Use a vegetable peeler to slice the carrots lengthways into ribbons.

Combine with remaining ingredients and toss with some of the dressing.

Serve with fish and drizzle over remaining dressing.



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Mangroves Equates to Fish with Bruce Belcher

Periodically, you'll notice a tour boat secured to the mangroves, just upstream of the ferry, on the north side. This is an exercise called Mangrove Watch, set up by Prof. Norm Duke of JCU in Townsville and his colleague, Jock Mackenzie. This project was set up by both men about 10 years ago. Their aim is to monitor the progress and results of their work among mangroves. Jock says, "no mangroves; no fish". So, I thought it was appropriate to mention their work, as most people reading this magazine have an interest in fishing.

Their scientific work is basically continuing on from work previously done by AIMS (Australian Institute of Marine Sciences) which was activated in 1987, using a vessel called M. V. Harry Messel. AIMS actually set up those observation points which I mentioned. As you're fishing, you'll have noticed nets hanging in mangroves, collecting leaves. This was also set up by AIMS. As we've become familiar with Norm and Jock, we've been asked to volunteer for various chores.

Obviously, with all the work they have to do, I guess the load is big. Australians, along with other nationalities, have come a long way with our approach to mangroves, considering their contribution to marine life. I recall when I was a kid, mangroves were considered a good place to dispose of things we had no more use of. I remember seeing old car bodies dumped in mangrove forests. Out of sight, out of mind!

One of the projects that I became involved with is known as SVAM (Shoreline video assessment method). Someone drives the boat at a certain speed (about 6 Knots), another uses a video camera pointing towards the bank, another calls the time (every few minutes) to make a note of where that position is and there are a couple of other volunteers. This exercise can go on for an hour or so, even down to the river mouth. Months later, changes to the scene can be observed; for better or worse.

From my discussion with Jock, I understand that one of their main concerns is for the local community to volunteer,



learn the procedures and eventually take responsibility to help them out. After all, the benefits of us all to get involved will mean a greater awareness and understanding of the importance of having mangroves, learning how to preserve them, appreciate the effects of global warming on mangroves and pass on knowledge gained for the benefit of future generations of people and the environment.

I urge anyone wanting to become a volunteer to contact Kiana Lafferty on 40986115 or email her at

info@daintreerivercruisecentre.com.au See you next month.



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