

POPULAR CHARLOTTE HARBOR AREA BAITFISH

Live bait will consistently produce larger catches of fish than artificial lures. However, some baits are not available from bait shops and must be caught by the angler.

Fishing with live baitfish presents a number of problems including how to get the bait, how to keep it alive, and how to present it to the target fish.

WHITE BAIT

The term white bait is a collective term that includes any number of small bait fish native to Charlotte County's harbor and coastal waters. Primarily it refers to **Scaled sardines, Spanish Sardines and Threadfin Herring.**

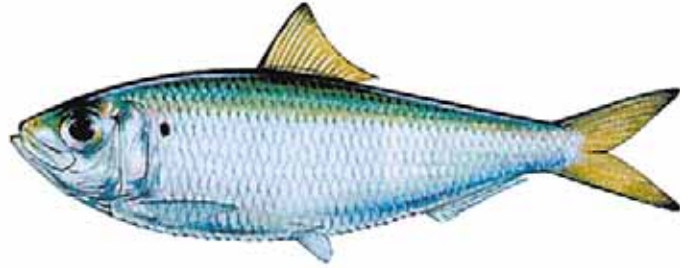
Scaled Sardines

Scaled sardines are usually not available from bait shops because they are very fragile and must be kept in highly efficient live wells possessing continuous water exchange systems. The live well must be able to exchange at least 350 gallons of water per hour. A circular well is best because a current is created by the pumped water.

The preferred size is 2 to 4 inches and usually must be caught using a casting net although a sabiki rig or a shiner ring also work. Because they are excellent bait, fellow fishermen are not known for sharing information about where this bait can be located.

Scaled sardines will come to chum, and a good recipe is a can of jack mackerel, 1/2 loaf of bread, and 12 to 14 ounces of water. Mix the bread, water and mackerel together and broadcast it by hand.

During the cooler months most of this bait migrates south. This bait should be fished freeline and the best method of rigging is hooking the fish just above its upper lip so the hook runs side to side.



Spanish Sardine

Similar to the Scaled Sardine the Spanish Sardine is slightly more elongated and missing the dark spot the scaled sardine has, but still attractive to local gamefish. This baitfish will not come to chum.



Threadfin Herring

These fish are more fragile than the local pinfish or sardines, and won't last long in most livewells. When they are close to the surface these bait fish leave their trademark small dimples on the water. They do not come to chum like whitebait, but you can occasionally net them in the same cast as whitebait and even on gold hook sabiki rigs. Sometimes it is easier to net threadfins if you have a netter and a boat driver.



Pinfish

Pinfish are frequently available at bait shops and can be found in local saltwater canals, around the harbor and river channel markers, and on the grass flats throughout the harbor.

The angler wanting to catch this bait can use a cast net, a sabiki rig, a pinfish trap, or a number 12 or 14 size hook baited with a small piece of shrimp. These fish respond to chumming.

Pinfish thrive in a circulating live well. They are an excellent live bait for pier and bridge fishermen because a