

Fishing with Captain Joshua Cooper

Fishing & Hunting Journal

by Tim Campbell

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The forecast for Friday, September 27, 2019, called for light winds and sunny skies, perfect weather for a day on the bay. At 7:15 am, Captain Josh Cooper and I headed into the Miles River from the public ramp in St. Michael's on his 2018 Cape Classic center console. We were greeted by a stiff 20 mph breeze as we passed the St. Michael's Marine Museum. The same thought occurred to us both; it figures the forecast was wrong. Undeterred, Josh smiled and steered his boat toward Eastern Bay. The 200hp Yamaha outboard engine pushed his 23' Maycraft through the choppy water with ease.

Josh and I had been planning this trip since we met at a Marine Resource Education Program seminar held by the Gulf of Maine Research Institute in March 2019. We sat in a hotel conference room at Arundel Preserve for three days with fisheries scientists, charter boat captains, outdoor writers and others getting trained on Fisheries Science and Management for the Recreational Angler. There were perhaps 30 people in all. The workshop was intense, but the presenters kept things moving. The class was well worth the time. After a full day of lectures and presentations, some of the group met at the hotel bar. That's where Josh made me promise to contact him to go fishing. I was thrilled to be invited. More than valuable training was coming from this seminar. Connections with good people are priceless.

Our first stop was a shoreline near the mouth of the Wye River. After several casts with topwater plugs and swim baits it was obvious that the winds were too strong for a good drift. No bites so we moved. Then one of Josh's fishing buddies called him to share some intel. His friend reported that there were birds working nearby so off we went. But by the time we got there the action had subsided, and we were only able to jig up a few small stripers. At least we got the skunk off of the boat. Josh searched the horizon with binoculars to find more birds. Not seeing any, we rounded the tip of Claiborne and Josh pointed his boat south. Along the way, Josh told me about the history of the Claiborne Ferry and the Perry Cabin Mansion where the reception scene from the movie *Wedding Crashers* was filmed.

We fished here and there before we finally spotted a group of birds diving on baitfish. Josh glided his boat near the action and we started catching small striped bass and bluefish. The school was moving fast and the breezy conditions were not ideal. Still, we stayed with the birds and jugged up a few more small stripers and blues. We let them all go.

Since Josh brought a live-well full of Norfolk spot, his plan was to anchor near a drop off and live-line the spot while we ate our lunch. Greedy stripers, snapping bluefish and speedy Spanish mackerel devoured the hapless spot in short order. It didn't take long to box four fat keeper stripers. The action was so hot that we barely had time to eat. The sun came out and the wind died down. If the trip had ended then it still would have been a great day. Lunchtime over, and the spot all gone, we agreed to look for more fish so we went further south.

Josh seems to have an eye for finding working birds. He spotted a huge beehive of birds off in the distance near the main channel. When we got there it was a sight to behold. A feeding frenzy of fish was busting bait on the surface into a bloody boil. Gulls were diving and squawking and gorging on baitfish.

We caught more small stripers, blues and mackerel. I frowned when I saw a cow-nosed ray swim by. Then Josh hooked into a drag screamer. His light action rod doubled over. The fish would not come up. We thought it might be another cow-nosed ray. I said, "Take your time, maybe it's a big red drum."

After about a 20 minute battle, Josh maneuvered his personal best 42 inch bull red into the landing net. Then it was high fives and wide smiles. I took several quick photos before Josh gently released his prize fish over the side. I was happy for Josh and said, "Where there is one big red, there must be another." Forty-five minutes later, I hooked into my big red drum about the same size. What a memorable outing. To charter a trip with Captain Josh Cooper go to 13milefishing.com or call (410) 253-8421.