

LAGOON LINESIDERS

must carry it with you when fishing in the refuge.

Once you've ascertained an idea of where it's safe to run, stocked up on goodies, and launched, it's time to let your snook brain take over. You'll want to look for deeper edges or ditches along the flats, flats bordered by creeks or natural channels, and shorelines that are on the perimeter of the flats where "deep" water (4 feet or more) is nearby. Snook are very temperature sensitive and this far north they will not normally venture too far away from the safety of the thermocline deeper water offers, lest a cold front sweep in and all but stop their metabolism.

Another component of this area to consider is the numerous mosquito ditches, dug in the last century. They have since accumulated a thick layer of almost black mud and this dark layer of sediment absorbs and holds heat. Flats and structure around these ditches consistently hold snook as well, even though the depth change may be less than a foot. On a recent outing, with redfish being the spe-

cies of interest, we poled far into the recesses of a shallow cove, watching in search of the tell-tale pectoral flare that often gives away fish. In the back of this cove, we discovered an opening to a mosquito ditch. In the cooler fall temperatures, snook hadn't crossed our mind but when we spotted a shadow sliding over the dark bottom, presented a fly to it and hooked up, the fish came out of the water violently headshaking. The snook's sandpaper lips almost immediately sawed through the 12-pound-test tippet. After re-rigging, we landed three healthy 23- to 26-inch snook in this muddy bottomed ditch mouth. From then on, a 6- to 8-inch bite tippet of no less than 25-pound-test has been our new normal.

Taking account of a snook's instinct to control its body temperature, we move on to structure. Just as a hunter sits in a blind, secluded by shade, snook want to be able to get into the shadows. As predominantly ambush predators, snook lie tight to the cover or shoreline to blend in as

AS PREDOMINANTLY AMBUSH FEEDERS, SNOOK LIE TIGHT TO THE COVER OR SHORELINE TO BLEND IN AS BEST THEY CAN.

Atlantic coast spring snook season is open Feb. 1-May 31 (myfwc.com for details) but many anglers choose to release their catches, as this angler is doing.

