

## BONITA (from page 7)

Bluefin Tuna had long since been scarce close to shore. Except for occasional late season forays close in, they had been pretty much become an offshore species.

In recent years schools of juvenile Bluefins have popped up often within a mile of the coast and within casting distance of the daily Fluke fleet. At first observation these eruptions shared the same visual attributes and therefore were at first glance mistaken for marauding Albies. The fact is, however although many of these schoolies were of the same proportions as the average Albies, there were significant numbers that reach into the twenties and thirties with a few flirting with the fifties. Only time will tell if this much-appreciated trend will continue.

Anglers visiting the offshore grounds, be they the nearer destinations or on out to the canyons, will run into another character sporting the moniker "Bonita." The Skipjack Tuna, sometimes called Skippys or Oceanic and Stripe-belly Bonito will often hit trolled baits intended for something else.

Skipjack Tunas (*Katsuwonus pelamis*) are distinguished by the presence of four to seven dark, longitudinal stripes on their bellies. Their dark blue backs are accentuated by a clearly defined area of green above the pectoral fin, which fades away towards the middle of the body. They have silvery flanks and bellies and short fins. The body of the Skipjack is cigar-shaped (tapers at both ends). The snout is sharply pointed and the mouth is relatively large. One Tuna data sheet I referenced has the life span of this species at about three years. The black skipjack tuna, *Euthynnus lineatus*, form schools in coastal waters and near offshore reefs. It is very similar to a frigate mackerel, but with a less slender shape and a narrower space between the dorsal fins. This species is also a possibility.

When it comes to what will tempt these aquatic greyhounds, they all share similarities in what will spark a response. They all have an affinity for fast moving baits. In years past we mostly employed trolling "feathers" consisting of a cast metal head decorated with red glass eyes and various colored feathers through which a leader was threaded and tied to the hook. These rigs were worked at a quick pace be it inshore or offshore to draw strikes from the mini-tunas.

These days there's an ever-growing array of baits that will fool these fish. Atlantic Bonito are very finicky close to shore, but they can be had. Fly fishermen do well with Bunny Flies in white, yellow and chartreuse. The Bonito Ghost, a small weighted fly with marabou that is tied by Capt. Jim White, a Rhode Island saltwater fly fishing specialist, is very effective as are small clouser minnows, and small bunker type flies or anchovies. Sinking lines are the best to get below the school or work the edges. Casting into the pile of fish makes no sense.

Small metals like Deadly Dicks and Swedish Pimples are effectual when they're in the mood for silversides. Matching the hatch as close as possible with plastic swim shads from Tsunami, Storm or Calcutta mimicking peanut bunker and tinker mackerel

can prove either very effective or very frustrating.

Fat Alberts are a bit easier to hoodwink as they are more aggressive, especially when they're revved up and tearing up the baitfish of the day. The above-mentioned lures as well as Kastmasters, Rapalas and several of the Yo Zuri hard baits are all Albie candy. Rigged soft baits like Slug-gos and Fin-s-Fish, with the hook threaded through the bait via a small rigging needle, produce an erratic action that has duped a lot of Albies for me.

When encountering False Albacore in the vicinity of an offshore dragger and competitively scarfing floaters, they are a pushover for just about any small whole by-catch fish or chunks. Chumming and chunking will also pique their interest

inshore. Unfortunately it will also generate the interest of Bluefish who will hound you and vacuum up your chum as fast as you can put it in the water. When the Blues attack they are usually in greater numbers and are so aggressive that the Albies don't stick around.

So now we've cover most of the fish that fall under the "Bonita" umbrella as well as a few who just happened to be in the neighborhood. While they are all distinct species with their own characteristics and quirks they all share one common correlation. They sure can stretch the string!


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Lures used by the author for bonito and false albacore


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