

Stalking redbfish, Charleston-style

By Bill Vanderford

For the Forsyth County News

Capt. Legare Leland switched off the big outboard and allowed the sleek Action Craft flats boat to slide its bow up into the grassy flat just off the Intercoastal Waterway a few miles north of Charleston Harbor on the South Carolina Coast. He quickly shoved his maneuvering pole a couple of feet deep into the mixture of sand and mud and tied the boat to it.

"We're still about 15 minutes until the tide will be over the grass enough to bring the redbfish in to feed," stated Capt. Leland. "We'll prepare the fly rods and put on our wading shoes while we wait."

Though the anticipation of sight-fishing for big redbfish in less than knee-deep water made one's heart pound, the tide continued to rise and the time passed quickly.

As the warm salty water became more than ankle deep, Capt. Leland began a slow, methodical trek across the grassy flat looking for the glint of a moving tail in the afternoon sun.

No more than 50 yards into the flat, Capt. Leland stopped suddenly and pointed at something about 10 yards directly in front of him. At first glance, most novice anglers would have missed the slight movement of grass and water, but on closer inspection, a tiny, triangular tip of a tail could be seen as its movement reflected rays of sunlight. It was a big, tailing redbfish feeding on fiddler crabs.

Having grown up a descendant of French farmers that date back more than 100 years in the South Carolina low country, Legare Leland has spent much of his young life outwitting redbfish — and his expertise was instantly apparent.

He deftly false-casted the long fly line until he had just enough to allow the crab-looking fly to softly touch

down right in front of the tailing red. One twitch of the lure and the calm water exploded as the nearly-10-pound channel bass exploded on the fly.

Leland's next 10 minutes were spent with a doubled rod as he stumbled through the water and grass until he wore the young redbfish down enough to carefully remove the hook and release him to fight another day. It was an exciting experience, but only the first of more than a dozen such occurrences that afternoon.

This thrilling type of sight fishing usually begins in August and reaches its peak during September and October, but even an excellent fisherman will need a good guide to fish these waters.

Capt. Legare Leland is considered to be one of the best when it comes to producing big redbfish on a fly. He is available for full or half day trips, night or day, by calling (843) 810-0495 or going to his Web site at www.headshakercharters.com.

Also, an excellent place to stay in the Mt. Pleasant area and near the fishing action is the Long Point Inn. This gorgeous bed and breakfast is on a tidal creek, serves excellent gourmet breakfasts and is perfectly located. For information or reservations at the Long Point Inn, call (843) 849-1884.

It is true that one might catch larger numbers of redbfish with live bait from a boat in the Charleston area at certain times. Nothing, however, comes close to the excitement of stalking these big reds in the flooded grass at high tide.

Bill Vanderford has won numerous awards for his writing and photography and has been inducted into the Freshwater Fishing Hall of Fame as a Legendary Guide. He can be reached at (770) 962-1241, JFish51@aol.com or at his Web site: www.fishinglanier.com.



Capt. Legare Leland began a slow, methodical trek across the grassy flat looking for the glint of a moving tail in the afternoon sun, at right, before finally landing the elusive redbfish, above.

Photos/Bill Vanderford