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Photo by John N. Felsher

Anglers without access to boats climb on the rocks to fish the jetties lining the mouth of Perdido Pass near Orange Beach.

SHEEPSHEAD: They love the rocks

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ling explained. “The close platforms off Fort Morgan are good places to look for big sheepshead. Many new reefs they put out near Perdido Pass can also hold some good sheepshead, flounder and speckled trout.”

Sometimes called convict fish for their striped coloration and an innate ability to quickly steal bait from hooks, sheepshead can provide incredible action on light tackle. One of the most abundant and powerful fish in coastal waters, sheepshead rely upon brute strength rather than speed and flash. They often hunker down in entangling cover and dare anglers to bring them to the boat.

Catching sheepshead doesn't take much finesse, but it does require stout equipment. With powerful jaws studded with strong teeth, sheepshead can mangle tackle. They frequently bite hooks in half or pop lines.

Despite their powerful jaws and impressive dental equipment, sheepshead gingerly nibble baits and don't rush out to attack food. Almost timidly, they examine morsels before deciding to taste them. Often, anglers don't even detect subtle strikes. Sometimes, the line simply feels heavy or mushy. Anglers must pay attention to subtle tugs. A sheepshead can quickly strip bait from a hook.

Sheepshead occasionally hit flies, jigs, spinners, spoons or other lures, but prefer natural bait. They'll readily gobble live or fresh shrimp, but

also eat live minnows, clams, squid and sometimes even cut bait. More than anything, they relish small live blue crabs or fiddlers.

Since they commonly hang around jetties, seawalls and docks, sheepshead offer outstanding opportunities for boatless anglers to land powerful fish. Many anglers without access to boats walk out on the Perdido Pass jetties to tempt sheepshead. Others fish from the Gulf State Park Pier, nearby seawalls or the beach, all excellent places to catch big sheepshead. To keep sheepshead around their docks, some people crack clams, or crush crabs and dump them into the water.

A fish cleaning station provides an outstanding place to look for sheepshead. People who clean fish usually toss the heads, backbones and entrails into the water. If these fish pieces make it past the pelicans, the fresh protein attracts crabs and other morsels that sheepshead love to devour.

Besides sheepshead, anglers can also catch good numbers of redfish, speckled trout and flounder in Perdido River estuary. Around the rocks and beaches, people catch pompano and large black drum. Just outside the pass, anglers frequently catch Spanish mackerel, cobia and other fish. During warmer months, king mackerel patrol the sandbars in the Gulf of Mexico just outside the pass looking for baitfish. One never knows what might bite on any given day at the pass.