

Mullet, a fish with a gizzard.

I decided to write an article about the humble mullet, and had no idea that it would stir so much passion about what we truly don't seem to know and can only speculate. Ask ten fishermen why the mullet jumps and you will get ten different answers from ejecting air from its swim bladder, removing parasites from its skin or the one I like, it's just having a look around. Ask the same ten, where is it going during the fall migration along the National Seashore and again you will get as many answers. This time of year the mullet is running hard south, against the prevailing current. They follow a well swam path much like the buffalo herds of old.

This migration will focus the predator, bringing them within easy reach of the shore, the beach fisherman realizing this, take advantage of this wonderful harvests. The fall Mullet run represents to the Texas beach fisherman the apex of his fishing year, "it don't get better than this".

We have got two species of mullet that we encounter in this area the Striped or Black Mullet, known to the local fishermen as the Mud Mullet or the Jug Head are by far the most abundant.

Insert Picture of Striped Mullet.



In the Panhandle of Florida these same Mullet that live over the white sand bottom bays make excellent off shore bates, being firm of flesh. Here the Jug Head has a far softer flesh and is full of mud making it not as durable for trolling and defiantly not as sort after as table fare as it is in Florida. However back in the 90s a market developed for the Mullet row, that still leaves a bad taste in the mouth of the local fishermen and legislators.

Speaking to Chris Page who has strong feelings about the Mullet, he spoke with a passion, that would make Dick Cheney look like a pussy cat, he shouted the description of how people would cast net the row full mullet in the passes, open the gut of the mullet and collect the eggs, this row was sold for \$4 to \$5 per pound. He scowled his last comment describing how the 1000s of Mullet would wash ashore, wasted. This is why we

see in our TPW hand books the closed season on Mullet over 12 inches during the months of October through January end.

The other Mullet in our area is the White, not as common as the Jug Head and is generally only found in the Gulf and near passes. The White Mullet is quite common in Florida where it is considered a prized table fare. They are quite rare around this area and difficult to distinguish between the two when fingerlings.

The Striped Mullet begins leaving our bays in September heading towards the Gulf where they form massive concentrations. On wind still days you will see them with there little mouths opening and closing bobbing along in massive shoals, "chirping Mullet". The larger Stripped Mullet separates from the smaller finger mullet and head off shore to spawn, this spawn will go on from October through to the following March, peak spawning being in November December. It is theorized that the Mullet might mature whilst in the Gulf much like the Reds do, gonads dropping and ovaries developing. Each female can spawn from 0.5 to 2.5 million eggs. Following fertilization the developing larvae will enter the bays on incoming tides via the passes and will grow up in the back food full bays and estuaries. Mullet are carnivores as larvae but are opportunistic omnivores as juveniles and adults, filter feeding on plankton but primarily on dead vegetable matter making use of there gizzard to assist in the digestion of the plant matter they eat. Mullet are one of the few fish that have a gizzard. Our Mullet's life expectancy will be from 4 to 6 years all being well reaching sexual maturity in two to three years and spawning once yearly there after. After spawning, adults will return to coastal waters and bays. The smaller finger Mullet are known to continue heading south along our beaches but no research is available, that I am aware of as to there destination, however again speculation is that they will head south and then reenter the bays, going back into the warmer bays south of the Mexican boarder were they will have a plentiful food supply through the following colder months. A lot of our target summer species will follow the mullet shoals, Tarpon, Kings etc.

In the spring I have observed the finger Mullet on the return path heading back North, this normally happens when our water has reached the golden number of 70 degrees. They are still not mature and I think they make the final growth to maturity (between 8 to 10 inches is considered mature) back in our bays in there second year.

Whilst I was doing this story I decided that we need some shots to show the different way to use this great bait. Heading for Fish Pass which is the first structure the will effect the southerly path the Mullet take when leaving Port Aransas I managed to catch a couple of Mullet in my cast net, the water was rough and high but I decided to sling the bait into a rip on the north side of the north jetty. No sooner had the bait hit the water and I had a Red on, it was a bit of a problem to land in the rough seas but it did show how effective the Mullet is.

When it comes to rigging you have quite a few options. For close work the hook through the tail seems to be the best, when using light tackle the Mullet can be thrown further when hooked through the tail. Also it gives him a head up angle to assist with keeping the bait up.



If you need to put a bit of distance between you and the place you need to fish stick the hook through its head, it stays on better and the bait stays alive just as long.



For Red Fish in dirty water and for extreme distance you will need to put a bit of blood in the water, I have had a lot of success by cutting the rear of the Mullet off, just shy of the anal vent, The Smaller bait will cast further and the blood in the water works well.



Now let me answer the question of why Mullet jump. This is purely my theory and I cannot blame any of my learned friends for what might be misinformation.

Here is something I noticed whilst doing this article.

The juvenile Mullet's pectoral fins lay low and level, when the Mullet matures the pectoral fin takes on an upward slant. Compare the two Mullet in the picture below, the one on the right is the mature striped Mullet.



From this I conclude that when the Mullet matures "ovary development and gonad's drop into place, the pectoral moves and firms".

I have never seen a finger Mullet doing what I call, "display jumping", I have seen a finger Mullet leave the water when being chased or scared. But not the lazy jump you see the mature Mullet's make, leaving the water and on reentry slapping the surface as they land sideways. This display obviously has risk as it attracts attention, but I can argue in my favor that a lot of display attitudes one see in nature are risky. The desire for attention is greater than the desire for survival. So after all this I can not say definitively where the mullet go when they head south along the beach and I can't say I have proof as to why they jump but I can offer the theory that the jumping is display and is tied into the dropping of the gonads or maturing of the ovaries, IE: It takes balls to jump.