

Capt. Leo Hiles guides his efficient fishing boat through the backwaters of the Indian River. Hiles will offer a seminar on inshore fishing techniques April 7

Learn the 'where, when and how' of inshore fishing

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EDGEWATER.. Ever wonder what a fish is thinking?

Ever wonder why the fish will not bite even when they are in plain sight of the bait?

Ever wonder why the fish are at one spot one day and not the next?

Well, Leo Hiles may be the best bet for finding the answer to these questions and he wants to share his techniques because as he puts it, "there are no secrets in fishing".

"What I want to be known for is not a guide, well, I am a guide, but an instructor guide," Captain Hiles says Friday morning as he carefully maneuvers his boat through the backwaters of the Indian River. "I want to teach people and when they go fishing I want them to learn the where, when and how of fishing."

Hiles, who has fished the local estuaries since 1954, will offer his first inshore fishing techniques seminar on April 7, at the Terra Mar Village Clubhouse, which is located on U.S. 1 just north of Oak Hill.

The idea of teaching the where, when and how of fishing came during the summer of 2001 and eventually led to Hiles applying for and receiving his captain's license, which was the easiest option for legally teaching the seminar. Hiles was required to take instructional and safety classes and written test, which he completed by Sept. 10, 2001. The terrorist attacks on the following day slowed the paperwork process and delayed Hiles' license nearly six months.

But now, license in hand, Hiles is ready to live out his dream of teaching what he considers mostly common sense and make use of the license by taking a few customers fishing for some hands-on learning.

"I'm not just going to put fish on peoples' lines," Hiles said. "I want them to take that knowledge with them and apply it when they go fishing by themselves."

As the sun begins to burn away the early morning steam fog, Hiles spots a school of redfish 100 yards away. Only a slight hum from the live bait well can be heard since Hiles shut down the outboard engine several minutes early and switched to a silent electric motor to sneak up on the unsuspecting redfish.

"They've nicknamed by boat the Blue Ghost because I'm so quiet" Hiles jokes. "You can't just come roaring up to where you know the fish should be because you'll spook them and after they've seen you they won't bite anything you throw at them."

Hiles' boat is all about silence as he has outfitted it with shock absorbent mats on the floor to avoid squeaky shoes and even lined the bait well hatch with rubber stoppers.

After narrowing the distance to 25 yards, Hiles tries artificial lures and after practically bopping a large redfish on the head with no luck it is determined that the water is far too clear and with no wind the reds can either tell the bait is artificial or as Hiles states, "it's just not what they want."

Next, it's dead shrimp that are thrown at the redfish with the notion that the redfish will not be able to resist the strong scent of the decaying shrimp. Plus, Hiles hypothesizes the reds will be searching the bottom for shellfish and will likely find the bait resting on the bottom.

After a few more minutes with no luck the dead shrimp is chucked for a live mullet, which ideally will swim far away where the redfish cannot see the boat.

The plan works and a large redfish attacks the mullet taking the hook into its mouth. The fight is on beginning 40 yards from the boat.

"Keep the rod up high with no slack on the line and go with the fish," Hiles says. "By keeping the rod up high and no slack on the lines you are less likely to have your line snapped by something on the bottom like oysters and if the fish isn't hooked well, it's less likely to come unhooked."

A reddish-brown flash breaks the surface of the water and as the fish sees the boat it takes another run in the opposite direction.

"Don't try to force the fish in," Hiles says. "If you force it in it may spook the other fish and it will still have enough energy to take you under the boat and snap your line."

After several minutes a 24-inch redfish is landed without spooking the others still busy feeding nearby.

Throughout the trip Hiles points out small things that many fishermen go years without learning. Things like being able to tell the difference between the wake a redfish and trout make in shallow water or the difference between seeing the flash of a swimming redfish or a large mullet.

"You can even tell what kind of fish you have spooked by the shape of the puff they leave behind," Hiles says referring to the mud stirred up by a fish as it darts away from a resting spot. "Mullet are small round puffs, sting rays are a large circle puff with two straight lines and trout leave a narrow single straight line."

This is some of the knowledge that Hiles wants to share.

When Hiles takes a client fishing he makes suggestions of what he believes are the best options, but it is the client that makes the decision of what kind of fish to go after or what method is used.

Hiles believes it is his part to share his knowledge and make his clients better fishermen and not just take them for a boat ride, that is, unless they want a boat ride.

His first seminar will run from 2 p.m. till 4 p.m. on April 7 and will cover techniques on lures, baits, freelining, rods, reels, knots, tackle and tides. The cost is \$10.00 per person and the seminar is limited to 100 people. As of Friday, 40 were signed up.

To make reservations or for more information, contact Captain Leo Hiles at (386) 345-2213.

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