

150.—ON THE POSITION AND CHARACTER OF THE FISHING GROUNDS OF THE GULF OF MEXICO.**By SILAS STEARNS.**

[From letters to Prof. S. F. Baird.]

I can furnish but a general idea of the position of the Gulf fishing-grounds. We have our courses and exact spots to go to, but I do not think that in so general a search as the Albatross proposes to make they would be of much use.

Our experience has been that wherever there is rocky bottom there is good fishing. So far we have found none below 40 fathoms, when the rocks end and the muddy bottom begins. Our present fishing-grounds extend along the edge of deep water, *i. e.*, 40 fathoms from a point southwest from Pensacola light to the neighborhood of south from Cape Saint George. Inside of this belt are numerous small gullies containing coral, but they are nearly fished out and are rather hard to find. In our range the inshore spots are most numerous in 17 fathoms south from Phillips, or Ocala Inlet. Everywhere south of Cape Saint George good bottom is found closer to the shore, in fact within 2 or 3 miles of it. As can be seen from a chart it extends much farther off.

In this section rocks occur in ridges and knots rather than in gullies, and the fauna is largely different. I think that the character of the fishing-grounds of the coast would be well illustrated by examining along the following courses: Starting just north of Key West in latitude $24^{\circ} 50' N.$, longitude $82^{\circ} W.$; steer northwest 136 miles, then going gradually from the inshore to the offshore grounds; then turn inshore northeast half east to reach the grouper grounds in $7\frac{1}{2}$ fathoms, at a point much fished by the Key West smacks. From this point, if the coast is followed by steering northwest by north 65 miles, many of the grounds as far as Anclote Keys, of probable future use to Lampa and other places near by, would be found; then steer west by north half north 117 miles to go over the grounds lying off Cedar Keys and to reach the eastern limit of the Pensacola, Mobile, and New Orleans fisheries. As before stated, west of this point it is only necessary to run along the edge of deep water to gain a good idea of the bottom, the fishes, &c.

There is an area, marked doubtless on most of the charts, in longitude $88^{\circ} W.$, latitude $29^{\circ} N.$, which we think is shoal and would furnish good fishing. If it is found to be what we suppose, it would be very convenient for the New Orleans vessels. We are interested to learn the results of experiments with trawls in these waters.

PENSACOLA, FLA., *December 7, 1883.*

RED SNAPPERS AND POMPANO.—I send by express to-day a little box containing a bottle of fine sand-worms, a bottle of sponge-like stuff which the red snappers are now feeding upon, and a few of the pompano shells. During the past month the red snappers have not been biting well, being filled with this spongy matter. We have not noticed the same kind of food in such abundance before this, and I have had a good chance to observe such things. A short time ago I had examined 450 large snappers' stomachs, and in only one case found anything but the matter that I am sending. Snappers are rapidly becoming scarce.

The "pompano shells" are the favorite food of the pompano. It is in pursuit of them that the fish come in shoal water along the sea beaches. The fishermen claim that when these shells wash ashore, pompano are present. We are getting pompano and other shore fishes from Tampa and vicinity. Other kinds, like the bluefish, have not appeared this winter, but I think they will come back some time.

PENSACOLA, FLA., *March 8, 1884.*

151.—A CALIFORNIA SALMON TAKEN IN JAMES RIVER.

By W. RUSSELL ROBINSON.

[From a letter to M. McDonald.]

It gives me pleasure to report to you the capture on the 16th instant, about 20 miles below the city, in a herring seine, of a California salmon of 9 pounds' weight. The fish was kept for me several days, but the messenger not finding me it was cut up and sold in the market. The fisherman bringing it to market did not know what it was, but it was recognized by a fish-dealer who purchased it for \$1. This dealer is familiar with salmon, as he very often gets on order small lots of the Atlantic salmon frozen from New York dealers. The pink flesh and fat condition is mentioned by a gentleman who bought a part of it, and the remains of the head place beyond doubt the fact of its being a salmon. I do not know whether it was male or female. It appears to me highly improbable that the only salmon entering the river should be caught, and I have high hopes of others being reported. I have seen all the important dealers, and offered controlling price for any other that may come in. I hope to send you a fresh specimen on ice. May not climatic or other causes, as yet not understood, be the reason for such a long delay in the return of the fish from the sea. Mr. Palmer and our association are very much cheered. It is a pleasant break of the monotony that has hung over the James River salmon question for these many years.

RICHMOND, VA., *May 26, 1884.*