



Chronicle of "arms race" of sorts as the writer realized the frayed rope lure, top, doesn't work so well on Florida and longnose gar. Stinger hooks seal the deal—but also create some headaches when releasing fish.

lake, porpoising as he went. So far, so good. Then he executed a jump that would make a snook proud. Still on! Finally I coaxed the fish to the net, sure I had the right formula. Gar were stacked up and after more hits, I landed five or six more. As expected, it took some doing to extract the hook with my long-nose pliers. They are so round, thick, and muscular that it is nearly impossible to hold them firmly while extracting the hook. A long-handled hook remover used for shark and other toothy fish is another excellent option.

GAR CONVERSION THERAPY

One evening a few weeks later, I'm having dinner at the Island Café in Everglades City with my erstwhile fishing buddy and accomplished fly fisherman, Robert Wayne, Esq. Mr. Wayne's photo has appeared on the covers of many national angling magazines, and he regularly catches big snook and tarpon in the Everglades. After he is done bragging about his latest tarpon conquest, I regale him with the tale of a leviathan long-nose. He looks at me and shakes his head. "Sounds like an interesting day," he utters with a sympathetic, smug smile. It's then I begin to plot my retribution!

I mention to Bob that I recently saw a bunch of juvenile tarpon rolling in one of the canals off the Tamiami Trail. That gets his attention, and we start planning an excursion for a week later. What I refrain from mentioning is that I also saw scads of gar there. The trap is set!

The appointed day arrives. As we pedal our kayaks toward the hotspot, we can see tarpon rolling. We also see gar everywhere. We ready our light 6 ½-foot spinning rods. Bob has on a white Gulp! curly tail grub mounted on an ⅛-ounce jig head that has worked on tarpon before, and I am using a gold-glitter curly tail, also on a small jig head. Surreptitiously, I have tied a new experimental gar lure on my second rod—a gold paddle tail to which I have attached a small #8 treble hook on its midsection.

I let Bob go first down the narrow canal. He immediately gets hits on his curly tail, but comes up empty. It's those pesky gar. Before he catches on, Bob hooks and lands a high-strutting tarpon which he proudly displays for the camera. Now it's my turn. I deftly pull out the gar rig when he's not looking and let the lure fly. A nice gar nails it and erupts into the air when I set the hook. As he slides in for a photo and quick release, I glance over at Bob who is sporting a Chesire-Cat grin and shaking his head.

Now he is up, and as we float farther down the canal, the gar get even thicker. Bob continues to target the rolling tarpon and gets a few swipes, but no hookups. Of course, the gar continue to try to feast on his grub but are striking at the long tail which means the big hook can't penetrate that narrow mouth. In a frustration-induced act of pure inspiration, Bob nips off the first half inch of the grub's head to shorten the lure and get at those short-strikers when they chomp on the bait's midsection as gar are inclined to do. With vengeance in his eyes, he casts to a couple of gar floating on the surface in front of us. As he retrieves the foreshortened grub past their snouts, one slashes to the side and nails it. Bob sets the hook, and miraculously it hits home. The gar dashes for the mangroves, but Bob heads him off, his rod bending perilously. The gar reverses course and dives towards Bob's kayak, then erupts in a twisting, turning jump that would have made any tarpon proud! Finally, the critter comes to the boat, and Bob grudgingly admits... he wouldn't mind a photo.

The rest of the morning and early afternoon, we concentrate on the gar, getting tons of bites and landing a half dozen. Bob's invention, the diminutive curly tail grub, works well as does my rig with the side-saddle riding treble hook. As we head back to my SUV, I ask Bob what does he think of gar now?

He offers a not-so smug grin and asks, "Are we coming back tomorrow?" **FS**