

## 5 QUESTIONS

## 5 QUESTIONS WITH...

## JONATHAN OLCHS

*A self-professed permit junkie reflects on one of salt water's greatest game fish, and the drive behind his latest two-volume masterwork.*

BY BEN ROMANS

**Q** Permit are one of the most sought-after, and prized, saltwater game fish. When and how did your fascination with this species begin?

**A** During the 1970s, catching a permit on a fly was considered beyond lucky—perhaps even somewhat of a fluke. It was on my first trip to Belize, wading along the coral reef with the roaring surf in the backdrop, that I cemented my incurable addiction to permit. Just the sight of those wagging sickletails in skinny water was enough to mesmerize me. Immersing myself in their world, I marveled at the permit's size, shape, speed, cunning, and unpredictability. I hooked 11 permit on that trip, and lost 10. Still, like many, I thought I had the game figured out. Total rubbish! What I did take away from that early trip was, unlike fishing for other game fish, permit fishing was legitimately a game of partial successes.

**Q** Your latest two-volume set, *A Passion for Permit*, is one of the most comprehensive works on when, where, and how to target permit. What made you want to cast such a broad net over the topic?

**A** My motivation for writing the book was to make a contribution to the fly fishing sport. Although I have garnered decades of obsessed experience in chasing these exotic and elusive fish on the flats in many countries, what did I—or the vast majority of other anglers—really know about permit? So, I sought out and/or researched the works of the best marine biologists in the world and gradually learned about the workings of a permit's unique anatomical features, its biology, sensory perception, behavioral traits, spawning patterns, and so forth, in an effort to merge the science with angling tactics. It was a six-year effort. The level of interest of anglers these days in catching a permit on a fly is just amazing!



Jonathan Olchs has spent decades studying permit, and learning from other experts everything he can about this challenging game fish. The culmination of what he learned is now a two-volume book set.

**Q** You interviewed and fished with more than 20 permit experts from around the world. What were some of the things you learned about this fish, or the pursuit of this fish, that you didn't know already?

**A** Many individuals graciously contributed their knowledge and insight to my book, perhaps recognizing the completed work would represent an enduring treatise on permit. Just to scratch the surface, Steve Huff schooled me on the importance of reading a flat before you fish it. Lincoln Westby shared his incredible expertise on wading strategies and permit behavior. Aaron Adams impressed upon me the significance of understanding permit habitats, the food sources found there, and how to extract that knowledge and apply it to selecting fly patterns. Bob Branham comes from a different angle. He has clearly proved that just a couple of fly patterns, and knowing how to manipulate those flies, are the critical component to catching permit in Biscayne Bay and elsewhere in the Keys.

**Q** During the last few decades, you've fished for permit all over the world in a variety of conditions. What are some common things you think prevent many anglers from setting a hook on one of these elusive fish?

**A** I believe strategic casting and line management skills represent the two greatest obstacles to success. There is often a narrow window of time in which to spot a permit and deliver the fly accurately. Learn to deliver the fly promptly with a minimum of false casts and excess movement. Line management is an all-encompassing concept. At the critical moment to deliver your fly to the permit, a stripping bucket will help keep your line from tangling, being stepped on, or blowing out of the skiff.

Try to think and stay ahead of each permit encounter. Choose the right fly by matching it to the habitat and prevailing conditions like wind, current flow, depth, and so forth. For example, crabs may migrate off the cold winter flats in the Keys, so permit may not be looking for them. Or, though stripping a shrimp fly may provide a greater hookup percentage,