

## Section 4: Cape Haze and Island Bay National Wildlife Refuge

Muggy and the school glide through mangrove roots that grow along one of the islands in Turtle Bay. Twenty acres of the mangrove shore plus some other land form the Island Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

Nearby is a fish shack built on pilings with water all around. It is a historic building because it shows a way of life from the past. Some fish shacks have rotted away, and others have burned, but a few exist.

Muggy and the school of fish glide beneath one. Barnacles and sea squirts grow on the pilings. Muggy hears someone playing a guitar and then footsteps. Muggy sees legs splashing into the water as a man and a boy sit on the deck. Then Muggy hears their voices.

"Tell me the story, Daddy, about the fish shack."

"You've heard it before, son."

"I know. I want to hear it again."

The man says, "Fishermen netted so many fish that their boat couldn't hold them all. They unloaded the fish here and kept on fishing. Another boat, called a 'run boat,' picked up the fish and took them to the fish companies in Punta Gorda."

Muggy swims near their feet. Air bubbles cling to the man's leg hairs.

The boy asks, "Why didn't the fishermen just come back and get them at the end of the day?"

Muggy circles the feet of the boy.

His father says, "If it was a good day of fishing, there would be too many. And even if it wasn't a good day, they would go bad waiting all day. You know how hot it is today? Imagine if the shack were full of dead fish."

"It would stink!" the boy says. Muggy watches the boy's toes wiggle.

"That's right. So the run boat would get the fish to the fish company while it was still fresh. That's important for any fish, but especially for mullet."

"Why?"

"No one knows why, but mullet don't keep. Mulletheads, the people who really love mullet, say you should eat them as soon as you catch them."

Muggy sees a grouper near one of the pilings. He and the other little fish hurry away.



### MULLET LIFE

by Lisa Figueroa, Taylor Ranch School, Sarasota

Striped mullet like warm coastal water that varies from salty to fresh. They live near streams and rivers or in brackish bays, inlets and lagoons with sand or mud bottoms. They school — swim together — for protection. Larger

fish, turtles, water snakes and wading birds prey on them. Mullet often leap from the water, and some scientists think they are escaping predators. Others think they are clearing their gills and collecting oxygen since they

live in oxygen-poor water. They are always eating tiny animals (zooplankton), bottom-dwelling (benthic) organisms, bits of dead plants and animals (detritus) and small animals with no bones (invertebrates).