

Praslin-Seychelles Fishing Newsletter - Edition 12/2013

Hello all!

I hope all of you had a very Happy Christmas. As usually the holidays here went rather calm. Unusual though was that there were many more tourists on the island in the first weeks of December which normally are very much an off season. Obviously many people made good use of the at this time quite affordable holiday rates though these unfortunately are not so much those which tend to go on excursions or fishing trips. A pity actually as this is one of the most productive times of the year allowing for many different fishing styles as you will see in this edition.

Before getting to December's catches I would like to cast a look back. The last edition came to you a day early as on the 30st of November the *Big Game Classic Tournament* was held from Mahe. I was lucky and pleased to join a team especially for this one for a special reason: it was the very first tournament in Seychelles that by the rules set promoted catch & release for Billfish! This was achieved by a point system that awarded more points for released Sailfish & Marlin unless their weight would exceed a certain threshold. The new rules were discussed quite controversially beforehand and there was also a certain amount of resistance. This also showed by the number of competing boats being 'only' 11 which is a lot less then in previous years. Even the more important it was to me to show my support for the new mode by participating.

Eventually I fished on 'Renegade' with Ameer Ebrahim and Henry Riggs-Miller, director of *FinS (Fishing in Seychelles)*, see www.fins.sc, a local high end tackle shop. Henry due to family relations fishes a lot around Denis Island at the northern Drop Off. As he was born in Venezuela and fished the Americas for long times his style is very different to what is common here: naked Ballyhoo or rigged with a lure, mostly on circle hooks using light tackle of 20-30lb. A feasty teaser is deployed in the middle of the spread and a 20lb (for Sailfish) and a 50lb outfit (for Marlin) are ready to pitch a bait if a Billfish shows up in the spread. This was new to me and thanks to Henry's patient instructions I learned a lot that day. So it was no problem at all that we did not happen to encounter any Billfish, but ended up just with some Rainbow Runners and Dorados. With those we could have filled the boat, though, as some point we found a raft drifting that seemed to be home for an endless number of those. But that would not have made any sense as Rainbow Runners were not eligible for this tournament and of all the other 'no-Billfish' species only the two heaviest specimen were producing points. I like that part of the rules also a lot as it avoids mass slaughter and requires teams to adapt their fishing in pursuit of other species. So we buggered off that area quite quickly in order to find other fish but eventually without success.



At 5pm on time returning to Marine Charter in Victoria the first thing seen produced a little of a shock: a Black Marlin was offloaded and weighed at 100.5kg. That fish had come to the boat dead and thus had to be taken. Everybody of course hoped that it would not be the only one of the day. Luckily it was not. 3 other boats had hooked up with Blacks and successfully released them - brilliant! Here is a picture of the fish released by team 'Special K':



Due to the point system those 3 teams were now even so to decide on the winner it was all about the other catches. As many teams specifically targeted Marlin using large lures and bait these were not too many. But still quite some very decent fish were unloaded as a 19.5kg Barracuda and this massive 46kg Doggie.



Eventual winner became team *'Island Star'* with 2,700 points edging out *'Ti Jo'* with 2,345 points. Next to our Dorados there was only a single other one caught between all the other boats. This one weighed at just 500grams more than ours so we missed out on that category price narrowly. But far more important is that this tournament and its new rules provided a real breakthrough for catch & release in Seychelles. I hope very much that this new set of rules will apply to more tournaments already next year so the general idea of releasing Billfish will become more common and eventually a normality. In my opinion there is no alternative. Of course it is true that the number of Billfish anglers take is a mere nothing compared to the amount killed by longliners and purse seiners. But how credible are we anglers in criticising and pointing at those practises if still Billfish blood drips from our fingers?

In the following days there were only a few fishing trips from Praslin producing mixed bags of smaller gamefish like Dorado, Yellowfin Tuna and Wahoo in varying numbers. Greg had a good day on the 2nd with many Tuna and Wahoos up to 20kg. A Sail appeared but was only window shopping. Also Martin had two 'half days' on Makaira with similar results. Same for Christian who reported a nice Wahoo of 22kg.



Quite a few Sails were seen but none of them was willing to strike. The German popping maniac Jürgen did another trip with Mervin on the 4th and caught a GT of about 35kg. They saw bigger fish but these also had no real appetite. On the 8th I went out with Jürgen who brought me some proper popping tackle for a few hours. Conditions were far from perfect as the wind was strong and picked up even more. But this trip was about learning some tactical and technical details of this kind of fishing anyways. Jürgen had a brief hook-up but the fish estimated at 20-25kg came off after a few seconds. Except from that there was only a series of frantic attacks by a Rainbow Runner who could just not handle the large popper. But a lot of self confidence it obviously had. Some point a charter sailing catamaran stopped not far from us and the people were waving. We suspected distress and went there. The tourists on board had just pulled up a still alive Sailfish and asked us if we would like to have it. Obviously we did not and recommended to release it. But they would not want to and instead dragged it up. So we were left shaking our heads.



On the 10th I joined Jürgen on a trip with Mervin, hoping for more learnings and some good footage. This went well as already at the second spot Mervin hooked up to and eventually caught a more than decent GT on a stickbait.



Only a little later Jürgen also had his go and presented this wonderful fish for the cameras. As both fish were caught on barbless single hooks taking out the hooks and subsequent releases went easy.



The following day I joined them again and once more it was very entertaining. In the beginning Jürgen had to deal with three Sharks that luckily all could be released.



His next fish was a really huge Barracuda which with a bit of luck did not manage to cut the leader. I have not seen such a big specimen here in Seychelles so far estimating that fish at well over 25kg. This one also was returned to the waters so to continue terrorizing that reef until being caught again another day.



Even as his target fish, the GT, seemed to avoid Jürgen by all means that day he just kept on going. Having tried it myself with such heavy tackle and big cup poppers, thus knowing how exhausting this is, I could only admire him for his tireless efforts. And it paid off eventually as all of a sudden a massive GT came up attacking and was on. The fight was so fierce I thought this can not work but it did. So Jürgen presented another really magnificent fish which of course was also released. Well done!



See more of these two truly exceptional fishing days and the catches in this month's video clip. Just click the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CXsVuGL9TM>

Don't miss it and switch to High Resolution 720dpi at the gear-wheel in the lower right corner of your player. It's worth it!

The next day they went out once more. This time it was all for Sandro, Mervin's deckhand, as he caught another nice GT.



As he added a very decent Jobfish to that it obviously had been his day.



That day I could not join them because before those trips something had bitten me and the whole thing turned odd: was attended to hospital for a week with blood poisoning and a very bad infection that on top was resistant to the initial antibiotics. Only just before Christmas I was released and as quite some flesh had been cut out of my leg I am now nursing a hole that pretty much resembles half an apple in size and depth. The doctor reckons it will take 3 months until its fully healed so no swimming and fishing for a long time. Really bad.

In the meantime the weather had become even more erratic. At this time of the year it is quite normal to have local cells of hard rain that come with strong winds and movements that are fairly unpredictable. If conditions were right some people went out and catches were pretty similar to the beginning of the month: mixed bags, most of the time well filled, of Dorados, Wahoos and especially school size Yellowfin Tuna. Greg reported a decent Barracuda and also a Sailfish that unfortunately had to be taken.



Those seem to have found their appetite again as also Christian caught one and Bertrand even two in a day. One evening Mervin called me as he bagged some Wahoos in a little fishing of 3 hours and suddenly had a small Marlin jumping in his spread. But it could not be tempted by anything they offered in the area for the next hour or so.

Faizal reported that around Mahe and very close in there are plenty Yellowfin Tuna and also a few Sailfish had been caught again. Due to the inconsistent weather only few boats ventured to the Drop. It is full of bait there with fish vomiting squid. He lost a Marlin out there while two other boats caught a Black and a Blue.

I guess that's been it for this month - or rather this year actually. I hope you all feel well informed on what this little paradise had to offer in 2013 for us anglers beyond all its other treasures. Now we will have to see what 2014 has in the bag for us.

A Happy and Prosperous New Year to all of you!

Tight Lines and best regards from Praslin,

Daniel