

INTRODUCTION TO BONE FISHING

Mark Brinkman was our guest speaker November to give us some advice on Bone fishing. Mark is from GWAFFA and has served as Chairman, Club Captain and currently Membership Secretary. He is probably less well known as the recipient of the Anglian Water “Angler of the Year” award for 2024 mainly for his work in organising the highly successful Bank Clearing operations.

What is his experience? He started, along mainly with GWFFA colleagues, in 2005 and has only missed a single year (due to Covid) since as his fly boxes testified. We started off with a short film showing typical conditions of pristine beaches, a crystal-clear sea which was in marked contrast to the weather prevailing in England at the time! A skiff, capable of 60mph, conveyed anglers to favoured shallows where the bonefish resided. Although most anglers seem to prefer the Bahamas, Cuba, Florida Keys and Mexico regions, Bonefish are widely distributed around the equatorial regions of the Earth. The record rod caught fish of 16 pounds came from the Indian Ocean. The photograph, lifted from the Blue Horizons brochure, shows a typical fish

The attraction of fishing for Bonefish lies in their extraordinary power to weight ratio compared with other fish and upon being hooked, take off at high speed for the deep water in the deep blue water surrounding the flats. Their mirror-like skin provides excellent camouflage and considerable skill is required in spotting the fish. It is widely regarded as a challenge! Often it is their shadow in the sand which gives them away. Bonefish tend to shoal up in packs of 30-50 fish and are constantly on the move. If the water is shallow – say knee deep, it may be possible to discern “V” wakes in the water. The fish sometimes feed vertically so that their tails protrude out of the surface. It seems that Bonefish are easily spooked and accurate, long distance, casting is the rule. First time visitors would benefit from a guide who would know where to find the fish (based on tide and conditions), act as a “spotter” and advise where to cast and strike. According to Mark, they can be a little overbearing!

Other sporting fish enter the flats with the rising tide from the blue water surrounding the atoll. GT, weighing in at 100 lbs, looked particularly exciting!

Reservoir tackle will probably do for the occasional visitor. Mark had an Airflo rod, a Sage TCR, backed up with a special made up on a Harrison blank. Line weights were between 8 and 10. Some guides may carry a #12 outfit for customers in the event that Permit should appear. Mark mentioned a Ron Thompson fly rod (for which I can vouch) as a bargain back up tool but I am not sure that they are still available outside of e-bay. I think Mark has used an Airflo T6 reel but these have crap reviews on the www. His other reel was a Vosseler which is highly regarded but has a price tag of £300+. One of his lines was a weight forward design recommended for casting bulky Pike flies in the UK. A leader steeply tapering down to 12 lbs was recommended for Bonefish. Fly patterns were typically in the size 4-8 range. The pattern was considered less important that the sink rate to ensure that the lure reaches the bottom (the feeding zone) when the roving fish are in the area. However, as far as I could tell, Gotchas, Crazy Charlies and Crab patterns were to be found in Mark's fly boxes. The flies are often tied upside down to avoid catch-up on some flats which may be weedy. Catch and release was the order of the day but I did not see any barbless hooks in Marks offerings! Similarly, I did not spot many, if any, stainless

steel hooks. Obviously, some care is required in order to minimise rusting. It was considered highly beneficial to attach the fly with a modified Perfection Loop to ensure maximum mobility. It seems that, unlike down-under, your fur and feather creations do not need to be sterilized prior to entering the country!

Mark emphasised the need to pack essential fishing kit in take-on luggage just in case – not uncommon apparently – the angler finds that his tackle is on a different flight!

Top of the personal essential requirements were ultra violet resistant clothing, including head gear, to minimise the effects of the sun. Mind you, he did point out that the weather was not always benign and fishing days can be lost due to storms. The flats consist of crushed coral and a decent pair of boots (Sims) together with gravel guards, was mandatory.

He mentioned several venues: Crooked Island was described as “civilised” and may offer the chance of catching a Barracuda: Great Inagua featured landlocked Tarpon which sounds exciting! Ascension Bay, in Mexico, was memorable because he caught a crocodile!!! Out of interest, it is worth looking at these venues with Google Maps to see the extent of the flats.

Mark, I think, would recommend newbies to visit these venues via an organised trip. There are numerous travel companies in the www but Mark advised reading the fine print to make sure that your requirements (car hire, guides, cancellation fees, and even tides are clearly met. I noticed a book on the desk, “Do it Yourself Bonefishing” by Rod Hamilton which I believe was the property of Alan . A quick peruse showed what it lacked on tackle advice, there were plenty of locations together, which what appeared to me, accurate maps.

A note of reality can be found in Rob (and Sam) <https://blog.fullingmill.com/a-diy-bonefish-adventure-in-the-bahamas> where they seemed to average just a couple of fish a day.